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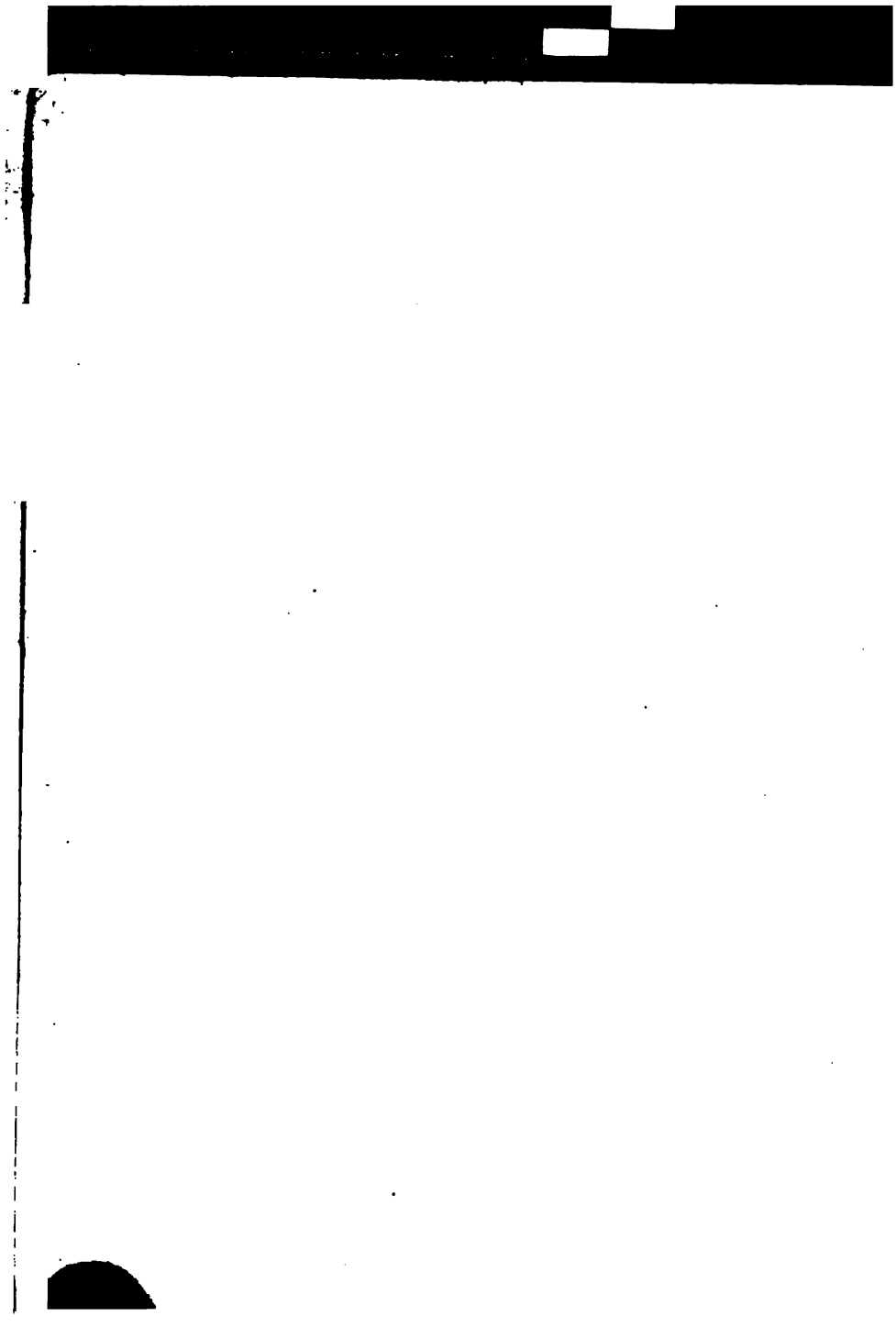
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"As closely as might be I followed, my eyes fixed on the golden bird"
(*See page 6*)

Carmichael

By

ANISON NORTH

Illustrated and Decorated
by CORA PARKER



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Doubleday, Page & Company
1907

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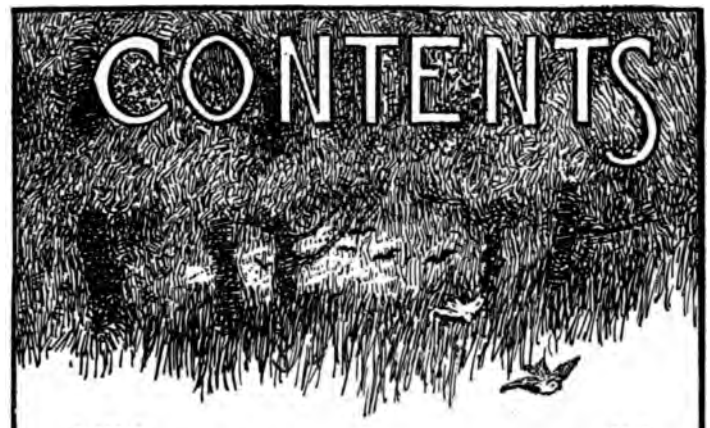
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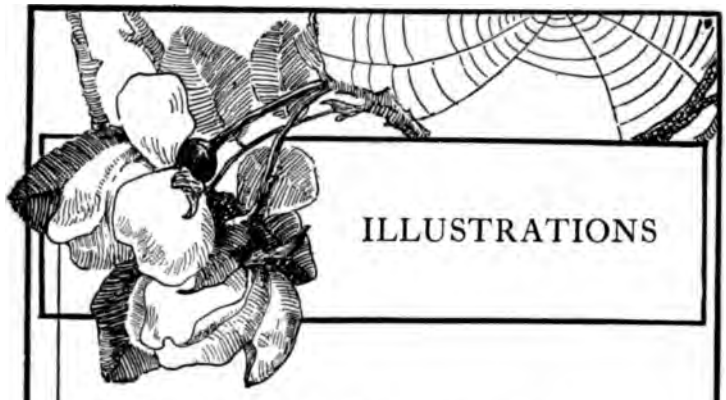
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CARMICHAEL







CHAPTER I

IN WHICH APPEARS THE BIRD WITH GOLDEN WINGS

LOOKING back upon that afternoon on which appeared the bird with the golden wings, it seems the fingerpost which marked the beginning of all the vicissitudes of my life. Before that there had been but the same uneventful routine, summers and winters filled, for the most part, with play and the child's joy of life; afterward many things happened, but of those later. . . . And yet my poor bird with the golden wings was innocent, and the cause of nothing whatever that followed, a good father bird, perhaps, wending its way homeward with a fat grub in its beak, and the slant afternoon sunlight on its flapping pinions.

The manner of its stamping itself on my memory was as follows:

We had been gathering strawberries, Dick

and I, in the meadow below our house, burrowing verdant channels through the tall timothy, or lying at full length at an especially good "patch," while little dog Jap stood by, wagging his great plume of a tail, and waiting with open mouth, to snatch the ripe berries from our reddened fingers. Oh happy childhood! Again, in writing of that afternoon do I look up through the heavy, swaying timothy heads, and catch the clear blue of the far-off sky, with the white fleece of a June cloud upon it, and the afternoon sunlight streaming down from it upon the green world! Again do I feel the crisp breeze, full of the elixir of life—or was it the life in us that transformed the breeze?—upon my cheek, and hear the silvery plaint of the meadow-lark flying low over the bending grass! Again, with the pleasant acid of the little red berries that stained lips and fingers, do I take into my being the tang of the fields and all the great out-door world! And again, looking between the thin green stalks, do I catch a glimpse of Dick, diligently cramming the ripe fruit into his mouth, and paying about as much attention to me as a





lad of fourteen, under such conditions, is likely to pay to a foolish little lass three years his junior. Happy childhood indeed. Can one ever get one grip of the essence of it in later life? One quaff of the simple joy of living that seems Paradise enough? And happiest of childhoods those spent in the country, where grovelling on old Mother Earth's bosom for the strawberry clusters that she holds close to herself among the timothy and redtop is but one of the thousand delights of a whole year!

And then, as we burrowed among the grasses that fair afternoon, looking out above the sea of shimmering green to the blue sky, I saw the bird with the golden wings. It was floating serenely, high in air, sometimes wheeling somewhat, as though to prolong a buoyant enjoyment of the summer day. Even yet I cannot say what kind of bird it was, but I do know that when I first caught sight of it there in the blue, and for the space of nigh half an hour afterward, its wings and body shone like burnished gold.



Excitedly I sprang to my feet.

"Look, Dick, look! Oh, see the bird!"

Dick too was on his feet in an instant. "Hooray! Come Peg!" he shouted, and, catching off his straw hat as was his habit when starting on a race, he was off on a run through the meadow, crushing the tall grass to right and left with a recklessness that boded trouble for the mower.

As closely as might be I followed, my eyes fixed on the golden bird. Jap, too, glad to know that something of unusual interest was on hand, bounded on ahead with sharp yaps, his black head appearing from time to time above the wriggling mass of green that marked his way through the timothy.

Here was a fence, and beyond, a green hill where travelling was easier; and still our bird kept easily in advance of us, flapping its bright wings steadily, as though keeping ahead of two panting children were but play.

Passing over the crest of the hill Dick slackened speed a bit, and I caught up to him.

"Why Peg, you're puffing like a grampus," said he, with that inkling of ridicule in his

voice which a half-grown lad usually assumes toward a younger and weaker companion.

Sometimes I resented this trace of ridicule, for it was not my fault if I could not climb trees and run races with the best of them; but to-day, I paid no attention to it. A new and absorbing idea had taken hold of me.

"Dick," I said, in a half-awed whisper, "do you think it is an angel?"

"Angel! Pooh!" said Dick, "It's a bird. Don't you see its wings going it, something like a hawk's?"

"Well, angels have wings, haven't they?" I retorted.

"But angels haven't tails, leastways bright angels haven't," returned Dick triumphantly, "and that one"—mixing his pronouns badly—"has a tail. I can see it, can't you? 'N' sometimes it wiggles. There, I see it wiggling now! Can't you?"

But I saw neither the tail nor the wiggle. Besides I was getting badly out of breath, and was only fearful of losing the bird, which had now settled down to a more steady sweep toward the great bank of woods that stretched

like a rampart along the back of my father's farm and thence along the "backs" of all the farms along the line.

"Let's run, Dick, or he'll get away on us," I said, and on we went again, down the incline toward the stream that ran through the "beaver" meadow at the edge of the wood.

"I'll tell you," panted Dick confidently, "it's a rare bird in these parts—a golden eagle, may be, 'n' you know it 'ud be worth something to find its nest. There might be eggs in it, or may be a whole family of little eagles, 'n' if we got them 'n' sold them in Saintsbury we might get a lot o' money. I'd give you half, you know," with praiseworthy magnanimity.

"'N' what'ud we do with the money, Dick?" panted I in return.

"Why, I'd buy mother a silk dress, 'n' you a silk dress too may be, for not being a cry-baby like Gay Torrance. What 'ud you do with yours, Peg?"

"Why," I considered, for the possibility of having money of my own to spend had never entered my head before and was worth de-



liberation, "I'd buy you a knife, Dick, 'n' I—I guess I'd buy mother a silk dress too, only," dubiously, "I'm 'fraid my mother wouldn't wear a silk dress. She would say it was 'stravagant."

"A two-bladed knife, Peg?"

"Yes."

"Rogers?"

"I guess."

"That 'ud be great. Can you walk that log, Peg?" for we had come to the creek.

"Course I can," indignantly.

"Take my hand?"

"No, I'll go myself."

"You're a brick! Hurry though, for that fellow's making good time."

Dick ran over on the log, and I followed, bravely trying to run likewise, but wabbling as is the manner of girls crossing streams on logs. When I could raise my eyes from the narrow bridge which alone separated me from the shallow, dimpling water, I saw that a change had come over my bird. No longer golden, as it descended to the wood it was as dun-coloured a creature of the air as the com-

monest hawk that might hover above a wood on any summer's day. A cloud, possibly, had passed over the face of the sun; or perhaps the sunlight was now striking the flapping wings at a different angle. I do not know. But I well remember the thrill of disappointment with which, with the passing of the gold, I saw our castle go tumbling down: the nest of golden eaglets; the little heap of green bills and silver quarters; above all, the doubled-bladed Rogers knife that was to rejoice Dick's heart. Even so, in later life, are our castles often shattered, and we seldom understand that the fallen stones go usually to build a foundation upon which more stable structures may be erected.

"Oh Dick!" I cried, "the bird!"

Dick whirled round, for he had been watching me in smiling expectation that I should fall into the water.

"Pshaw!" he said, "It's only a hawk or something, after all! It must have been the way the sun was shining that made it look so!"

"Guess so," returned I, "'n' now you can't

buy the silk dress, Dick, 'n' I can't buy your knife. Oh Dick, I wish I could, ever so!"

"Never mind, Peg," sympathetically, "I feel just as if you'd given it to me, because I know you wanted to. See? 'N', Peg, when I grow up 'n' earn money I'll buy you the silk dress, sure. Now, Sis, cheer up. Let's go up, now we're this far"—evidently seeing a necessity, from my rueful face, of changing the subject, "'n' see where father got out the barn timber last winter. There must be a big hole in the bush up there, with the fire wood 'n' all."

Nothing loath I plunged after Dick, through a "swale," from that into a thicket, thence into the more open wood where the fence that marked the boundary between my father's farm and Dick's father's, might be more easily followed.

It was a very harmless looking "snake" fence, made of honest, gray rails now showing some signs of age, weather-beaten into the dull silver with which Nature paints the glaring crudeness of the new wood, blotched here and there with a kindly brown lichen or



patch of green moss, and mantled all over, as it crept up an incline nearer to the clearing, with the greenery of raspberry and thimbleberry bushes. Yet I looked upon it with a feeling akin to horror, almost as though it were a sort of live thing zigzaging itself, serpent-like, up the hill-face. For it was over this very fence that had arisen the feud which had "put between" the houses of Mallory and Carmichael.

Since that day so long before, no Mallory save me, and no Carmichael save Dick had ever set foot over the line fence which ran the full length of the "string" hundreds. The battle had been fought before I was born, but I knew enough of it to look upon it as a catastrophe of past history. My father, as it fell out, had been in the right, and the slice of land claimed by Carmichael had been promptly transferred to the Mallory estate by the surveyor who was at last called in to settle the dispute, and who departed with a fat fee in his pocket and a sense of thanksgiving in his heart for line fences and quarrelling farmers in general. Henceforth, to my father Henry

Carmichael was a scoundrel of the deepest dye who would rob you of the butter on your bread while you looked round for the knife to spread it with. What Carmichael thought of my father was a light by no means hid beneath a bushel. "A damned hypocrite!" was his summing up of the whole question, expressed with the greatest nonchalance whenever an opportunity offered; whether my father were present or not made little difference.

For my part, in my own way I hated as well as feared this enemy of my father's house. To me he was an ogre as terrible as any hobgoblin of the fairy books; and at any time the sight of his huge figure and rugged face all covered with a curly beard was enough to send me scurrying off with thumping heart. But what I lacked in love for Carmichael, I made up in affection for Dick. To me, in those early days, Dick was everything, brother, sister, playmate—for I was an only child, as was Dick—and I believe his liking for me was as deep and unselfish.

It seems strange now that the friendship

between Dick and me was never interfered with. I suppose our parents thought there was little use of passing the feud on to the second generation. However that may have been, Dick and I were daily companions. To be sure I never dared go near the house where the burly man might be, nor did Dick ever enter our home; but along the quiet country roads and through the fields we ran and clambered as pleased us, and no one said us nay. To others the trill that came so often from the meadow field—three quavering notes with a ripple following—was but the warble of the field sparrow, but to me there was no mistaking the song of the sparrow, and I knew when Dick called. Happy was I then if no task prevented me from running off to join him in a free wild ramble over hill or down valley.

But to return—for I am digressing—passing along close to the "snake" fence with its brambly draperies, we came to the place in the wood whence the timber had been taken. Truly, as Dick had said, there was a "great hole in the bush" here. Bare stumps, with





tops still yellow with newness stood on every hand, with here and there the remains of a skidway, or a pile of cordwood drying for winter use; and everywhere flourished luxuriantly the strangely formed crop of weeds that springs up wherever the forest has been laid low, great mulleins and willow herb, curious little flat burs, raspberry bushes and thistles, with traces, wherever a stump had been burned, of wood-sorrel and fireweed.

Nevertheless the nakedness of the spot, in contrast with the surrounding forest, aroused my sympathy. At one moment it appeared like a neglected cemetery, each stump a tombstone marking the spot where a giant had fallen; at another each severed trunk, bleeding still as it were from the stroke of the axe, seemed crying out against the hand of the tyrant, man. But Dick was troubled by no such tender emotions. The might of the arm that had felled the monarchs of the wood appealed to him more than the fall of the monarchs themselves.

"Isn't it grand to be able to throw down big trees like these, Peg?" he said, admir-

ingly, "Father cut them all himself early last winter. He's the best timber man in the country. Jack Hall said so, 'n' he knows. It's great to be a strong man, Peg, and when I'm a man I mean to go into the bush 'n' make father just hop to keep up to me. Father 'd like no better fun."

As he spoke the lad drew himself up to his full height unconsciously, and there came upon his face a look which I had never seen there before. It was a look that I did not understand, and yet even then there drifted across my childish mind a hazy idea that soon Dick should have outgrown me and become a man, who would, most likely, drift out of my life and take to quarrelling over line fences and things. I hoped he wouldn't wear a bushy beard like his father's, but didn't dare to mention it. The next moment, Dick was climbing up a slanting trunk like a monkey, and was a boy again. Reaching the top, he looked about.

"Why Peg," he said, "I didn't know you folk took out timber last winter too?"

"We didn't."

"But you must have. There are new stumps right over the fence from father's. Come till we see."

Another minute brought us to the spot, and there, sure enough, were the newly cut tree trunks, several of them, on the Mallory side of the fence.

"I guess we must have," said I, dwelling on the "we," with a swelling sense of importance. "I guess father must have cut down these trees when I didn't know. My father isn't big like yours but he's just ever so strong, as strong as—as——"

"*Methusalum*," prompted Dick.

I nodded, then wondered what Dick found in my doing so worth laughing at.

But the shadows in the wood were beginning to lengthen. It was time to go home, and I made up my mind to lose no time in asking my father if he too were intending to "put up" a new barn, an event of great importance in our neighbourhood, and one which, if carried out on our farm, could not fail, in my estimation at least, to invest the Mallorys with an importance equal to that



with which the prospective Jamieson and Carmichael "raisings"—for there were to be two raisings in our vicinity this season—had surrounded the Jamiesons and the Carmichaels.



CHAPTER II

THE DEEPENING OF THE FEUD

WHEN I reached home I found my father and old Chris already on the "stoop" by the kitchen door, washing their hands in preparation for supper. My father was a rather small man, who wore a closely trimmed dark beard, and carried his head very erectly, with the bearing of one who can look all the world in the face and is not often in the wrong. He seldom smiled and this solemnity of countenance, together with the few deep, perpendicular wrinkles above his nose, lent his face an aspect of extreme sternness which, perhaps, did not all belie him.

To tell the truth I was rather in awe of my father, and yet he was very kind to me; had never, in fact, been harsh to me even once in all my life. Sometimes, I thought, he even spoke more gently to me than to any one except my mother, to whom he was always



gentle; and occasionally, when I had pleased him and he put his hand on my head and called me his "good little lass," I was almost minded to throw my arms about his neck and cuddle to his breast, content in the strong, happy sense of protection which a child feels in the touch of encircling arms. Yet I never dared go so far, even when I wished to most.

With my mother, too, I practised but little more freedom. Once or twice, indeed, feeling the need of such tangible evidence of love—for the child-nature cries out to be petted and told of love, and is not satisfied with its proof as manifest in food and clothes and the sacrifice of parents who may work from dawn till dark for its sake—I had run to her and settled myself on her knee. But invariably the result had been the same. "Tut, Tut, Peg! What a great girl to be clamberin' on people's knees! Run away, now, 'n' knit your stockin'. I'd been ashamed at your age to be sich a baby!" And so I had been obliged to forego the warm, heart-to-heart touch that I craved, and to bend over the needles which I had no great love for, and

had come to look upon as an invention of the Evil One for taking up time that might be better spent. And yet neither the unresponsiveness of my parents nor the ever-presence of the needles served to mar much the happiness of my life. For the first, I was used to it, and my vague longing for caresses had not yet become crystallised into a realisation of my capacity for loving and intense need of being loved; as for the second, my mother, absorbed in her household duties, so long as I gave her no trouble was lax enough as to what I chose to do or to leave undone, and so, very often I am afraid, the slowly growing stocking was laid aside as speedily as might be, and I stole away for a happy ramble with Dick, or to nestle down close by old Chris, who usually sat outside of a warm summer's evening or at the noon-tide rest, whittling wonderful articles from sticks, and humming to himself, with various and unaccountable digressions from the "tune," snatches of an old-time ditty.

"Sing out, Chris," I would sometimes say, and he would invariably respond, "Well,



little girl, which 'll ye have—a 'Come all ye,' or a 'As I roved forth'?" Usually I chose the latter, for the "As I roved forth's" had even more variations in topic than the "Come all ye's," and, as being more by way of stories, were likely to be the more interesting. I noticed, however, that when Chris hummed to himself it was never either à "As I roved forth," or a "Come all ye," that he sang. Oftenest it was an old Psalm tune that sounded much—as much as Chris could bring it—like "The Lord's my Shepherd," and once, just once, I caught a line or two of "Flow gently, sweet Afton,"

> "My Mary's asleep by thy murmuring stream:
> Flow gently, sweet Afton, disturb not her dream."

Strangely incongruous, perhaps, had I been old enough to detect the incongruity, might it have seemed to hear the words of the plaintive little love song crooned forth from the lips of this rugged, wrinkled old man, with his one wisp of gray hair over his forehead, and his neck and hands browned like weasened parchment; and yet, who knows—perhaps there was a bit of heart-history behind it all;

and can there ever be incongruity between heart-history and love-songs?

Old Chris was our "hired man." He had been with us as long as I could remember, and it had never entered my head to ask whence he had come to us, or why. To me he was as much a "possession" as the great oak table that stood in the kitchen, or the tall clock or huge black walnut cupboard which had been my grandmother's, and were the pride of my mother's heart; and if it ever struck me in a vague way that the clock and the cupboard were much more to my mother than was old Chris upon whom she never lavished a thought, perhaps because he needed none, why, with that I had no reason to quarrel, since it left him the more to myself.

As I said before, then, for I have been rambling sadly, when I came home that night I found Chris and my father already washing their hands on the stoop. The kitchen door stood open, and from the darkness within I could see the bright glow of the fire in the big cook stove. Almost at the first glimmer, I had seen Jap prick up his ears,

then elevate his nose and begin sniffing the air in a way which foretold something he liked for supper.

"Pancakes, Jap?" I said, for Jap's love for pancakes was deep and true.

Jap answered by a leap and a yelp which if not in answer to my query was at least indicative of his immense satisfaction with things in general and the prospect of pancakes in particular; and, with a mutual impulse we started off on a run past my father and old Chris who called out "Hoity-toity, little girl!" and into the shining kitchen where, sure enough, enveloped in a savoury smoke, my mother stood, deftly turning with a cooking trowel the crisp brown cakes, her pink cheeks pinker still with the exertion and the heat, and her hair in little dishevelled ringlets about her face. My mother was considered a very pretty woman, and her prettiness was no doubt enhanced by certain little conceits which she clung to with a conservatism which brought a glint of her girlhood right on into old age. She never would, for instance, comb her hair into the prim tight



rolls which came into fashion early in her married life, but kept on "putting it up" in the bow-like knot with a curl on either side that she had worn on her wedding day; and, though no Quaker, she invariably wore about her round throat a white, Quaker-like scarf, which by no means detracted from her plump, pink beauty. Perhaps she knew the little white scarf was especially becoming to her. More likely, though, she wore it out of a sense of the "clean look" it never failed to carry with it. To her, unconsciously, it may be, it was a sort of badge or signet of her immaculateness as a housekeeper, and, without it, in all probability, she would have felt very much as though there were a spot on the kitchen floor or a hole in the linen. And, indeed, what more suitable insignia could there have been of—as my father delighted to call her—"the trimmest and thriftiest housewife in Oroway"?

My mother, in truth, besides her deep affection for my father, which ran like an undercurrent beneath all her thoughts and actions, was possessed by two ruling passions:

the necessity of "saving up" for me (although I, heedless child, thought little enough of this at the time, nor well understood how much it meant when she said, "I want to leave ye well set up, Peggie"), and the ambition to excel as a housekeeper. In this last she was eminently successful. No other cook in Oroway could make such appetising meals "on so little," and as for cleanliness, she made of it a fine art. She had a rare eye for specks, and her kitchen, as indeed, every other part of the house, showed it. From the sand-scrubbed floor to the shining windows it would have taken a microscope to discover spot or blemish, and, although my mother regarded the incident as the crowning compliment of her life, it was not, perhaps, wonderful, that Dave Torrance once put his head through a window pane in the mistaken idea that there was a "light" of glass out.



My mother's housekeeping was, in fact, at once her pride and her bondmaster. But what if it kept her rubbing and scrubbing from morning till night, ironing and stitching, often, when others were in bed? Wasn't



there no end of compensation? For instance, if Mrs. Might, or Mrs. Torrance, or any other neighbour happened to drop in at any hour of the day, no matter how "unseasonable," wasn't she almost sure to find everything in incomparable order, and, paradox of paradoxes, the plump little housewife herself sitting calmly knitting and rocking away by the window with the snowiest of white aprons "on"? Surely it was not necessary to explain that the apron hung in perpetual readiness behind the kitchen door which, as it stood open, provided an effectual screen; nor that, except upon such important occasions as could not be postponed, such as baking or floor-washing, the appearance of a strange bonnet above the pickets near the garden gate was the signal for a general whisking out of sight of whatever "work" might be on hand, and the hasty exchange of aprons behind the door.

There was a cap, too, most wonderful of construction and immaculate in hue, which was kept in a convenient hiding place, but was only produced on especial occasions.



For instance, if but the black walking-hat of Mrs. Torrance—a prolific mother who, though "showing" enough in the census returns, was yet classed somewhat as a second-rate housekeeper in the community and suffered some loss of prestige in consequence—became visible at the turning-in point, only the apron made its appearance. If, on the other hand, the black ostrich tips of the minister's wife, or the purple ribbons of Mrs. Might fluttered between the lilac bushes, both cap and apron were produced.

Mrs. Might, be it remarked, was a lady who at forty-seven had married the richest and the only childless widower in Oroway township, and had, by reason of manifold and patent virtues, established a "position." Mrs. Might, by way of illustration, had always been a firm believer in character. "Character," as she was wont to remark and right truthfully, "is one's best wealth." For many years prior to her marriage, moreover, it had been her strong conviction that one's character should be formed *before* one married. All this, it cannot be denied, is

most excellent philosophy, and if, in Mrs. Might's definition of it, "character" meant the possession of a plentiful supply of opinion to be produced on occasion or, sometimes, out of it, why it must be conceded that all people cannot look through the same glasses, and the philosophy is by no means impaired.

However that may be, Mrs. Might, or, rather, "Miss Green that was," lived up to her convictions and most certainly, if she brought her husband but small store of earthly possessions, she made up the deficiency in a plentiful store of opinions cut, dried, and harvested; a goodly crop, well-cultivated, doubtless, during her long preparatory period of character-forming. Mr. Might soon found out, moreover, that Mrs. Might's opinions were by no means vague, spineless specimens, but good, sound, substantial ones ready at short notice to straighten themselves up and give proof of their existence in prompt action. For example, Mrs. Might's opinion—or Miss Green's rather—was that all newly wedded folk should go on wedding trips. Mr. Might's opinion, on the contrary, was that when wed-

dings came in haying time, with rain threatening at that, newly wedded folk should *not* go on wedding trips. So there it was: Mrs. Might would, Mr. Might wouldn't, and the upshot of the matter was that, half an hour after the Might-Green ceremony (which took place, of course, precisely in haying, with a big, black cloud hovering in the west) Mrs. Might set off *alone* on a two weeks' wedding tour to her sister's up in the "Queen's Bush." Lest, however, anything I have said may give prejudice in regard to this good, old Oroway friend, I may say right here—for I have no mystery to preserve in regard to Amanda Might—that a more wholesome, all-round soul never breathed, and that the numbers were not few in Oroway township who were ready to say that though Amanda Might had her peculiarities she was "pretty much the right sort after all," and that "Adam Might had been pretty lucky to get her."

Being, however, a woman of opinions, and such opinions, and bearing with her, as she did, the reputation of being a most excellent housekeeper, a qualification which her im-

proved circumstances enabled her to en-enlarge upon, it was not remarkable that Mrs. Might should prove to my unaggressive, home-keeping mother, a most formidable woman, and that my mother should don, not only an immaculate apron, but also an immaculate cap in her honour.

My poor little mother! It was her only deception; and yet I am very sure that she never dreamed of deception even in that. She was not given to self-analysis, and, althought a little pardonable pride may have been at the bottom of her apron-practice, I am sure there was another reason. Unlike many women who keep things in the pink of perfection and end in being shrews, my mother could not bear that any one about her shouid be, in any way that she could understand, uncomfortable. Uneasy herself whenever spot, or speck, or clamour, or hurry was in evidence, she deemed that others must be so too, and in her zeal for quiet and order, and the proper entertainment of her guests, was likely, sometimes, to overreach the mark.

"I do hate to be caught tothery," I once heard her say to Mrs. Might. "Now there's Mrs. Torrance" [discussion of our neighbours and their doings was, it will be seen, by no means considered bad form in Oroway], "go in at any hour before bedtime 'n' you 're sure to find her all in a muddle! 'N' nearly the whole time you 're there she spends in apologisin'. It's 'My bread 's later than usual to-day; the baby 's teethin', 'n' kep' me so I couldn't git it set in time'; 'n' 'I hevn't got at my scrubbin' yet. Choddy got lost 'n' I hunted fer him two mortal hours before I could find him'; 'n'—'don't look at my stove, Mrs. Mallory. I know it's a disgrace after *your* shinin' one, but Gay was goin' to a pic-nic 'n' the frills on her dress took so long to iron';—'n' there it goes. She keeps yer eyes hoppin' round to see all that's undone that ought to be done, 'n' she looks that hot 'n' flustered! I declare to gracious there 's no peace nor comfort goin' there, 'n' I alwus come away tireder than I went, 'n' sayin' to myself that come what will I 'll keep my place in peace 'n' quietness, 'n' be able to talk civil

to a neighbour when she comes in. Fer my part I can't see how Dave Torrance stands it all the time. I'd think more o' *my* man than keep him in sich turmoil."

To this dissertation—and it was seldom my mother spoke at such length except when launched on a "moving" subject—Mrs. Might had listened sitting bolt upright, smelling salts in hand, in an attitude of severe censure against delinquent housekeepers in general and Mrs. Torrance specifically.



"That's jist it, Mrs. Mallory," she said when my mother had finished, with a solemn jerk of approval that sent her purple ribbons a-tilt, "but he's used to it, poor man! I don't know what on airth Matilda Torrance 'ud do if she hadn't a string o' young ones to blame all the shortcomin's on. Fer my part, I say apologisin' 's like puttin' gold 'n' diamonds in a pig's snout; it only makes the ugly thing behind it all the uglier. It was never the way o' the Greens to apologise, nor," tapping her salts-bottle, "to need apologisin', so far's I know, 'n' if I kin manage it, it 'll not be the way o' the Mights neither."

By this time my mother, feeling that she had been, perhaps, too severe, was prepared to retrench.

"After all," she said "mebbe there 's some excuse fer Mrs. Torrance. It 's easier fer you 'n' me to talk, Mrs. Might, that is n't blessed with so many to work fer."

But Mrs. Might tossed her head again, with a less assenting sniff.

"No excuse at all, Mrs. Mallory, no excuse at all! It all comes of famblies, sich famblies! It was never the way o' the Greens to hev' famblies, but when—people—*has*—them," marking off each word with a tap of her forefinger, "people has a right to bring them up proper, 'n' show them how to keep things in their proper places 'n' times, not willipy-wollopy every way. I 'm not sayin' that big famblies isn't sometimes more valuable than small ones like yours, Mrs. Mallory," with an air of having given much consideration to the subject, "in times o' war, fer illustration, or when big transcontinential railways hes to be built, but fer all ordinary occasions, Mrs. Mallory, famblies hes their disadvantages.

If Matilda Torrance 'ud spend more time on cleanin' 'n' thrift, 'n' less on nursin' babies 'n' ironin' frills 'n' frumperies fer them, it 'ud be tellin' her something."

So saying, Mrs. Might leaned back, in a seemingly conscious satisfaction of having settled at least one important subject.

But my little mother who, however much she might think a great girl like me should be able to stand on her own feet, had a warm spot for wee, helpless babies, shook her head timidly, as though half afraid to disagree with Amanda Might.

"Still," she said, "the poor wee babies lookin' up into yer face, 'n' cooin', 'n' knowin' their mothers first of all! I don't think, Amanda, that Matilda Torrance 'ud be willin' to give up any o' them—'disadvantages'—now."

And then Amanda Might did a strange thing. She let her smelling-salts bottle fall on the floor and roll under the stove, and she went over and looked out of the window so intently that I followed her to see what she could be looking at. But there was no strange

sight, beyond the lilac bushes, not even the doctor's buggy nor the minister's wife. Then, in a moment, she went back and sat down in her chair leaning very much toward my mother.

"I sometimes think," she said, "I'd ha' liked to hev' jist one—one child o' my very own, to love 'n' care fer, but don't ye tell it as long as ye live, Alice Mallory!"

But dear me, how I have been rambling on! and how very far from my return home on that mild June evening! It seems so easy, in thinking of those old times, to go on describing this old friend and that and interpreting each, sometimes, by the light of later years, and a broader wisdom. To return, then—and this time I must not wander. When Jap and I burst into the kitchen that evening, my mother looked up from turning the last pancake on the hissing pan.

"Love us all!" she exclaimed in her easy way, which made even her exclamation seem more like remarks than exclamations, "What a noise! Where on earth hev' ye been, Peg Mallory, all this time?"

"Back in the bush with Dick, mother. We went after a bird that looked all gold, 'n' I thought it was an angel. But Dick he thought it was a golden eagle, 'n' we went to see if we could find its nest o' golden eaglets. 'N' we were going to sell the golden eaglets fer a lot o' money, 'n' I was going to buy you a silk dress, maybe."

"Silk dress! Tush!" said my mother, ignoring the imaginativeness that could see angels and golden eagles in the sunlight on a bird's wing, "Don't you go to thinkin' about silk dresses. That's enough fer ne'er-do-wells like the —— all fer style, spend the money, never mind how comes it."

"Like who, mother?"

"I didn't say like nobody."

"Like the Torrances?" I queried.

My mother looked at me in easy reproach. "You're gettin' too sharp fer your years, Peg," she said. "Who ever spoke o' the Torrances! Here, take up the pancakes fer your father, 'n' call Miss Tring, 'n' don't let me hear o' ye traipsin back to the bush again when ye ought to be helpin' your mother get tea."

I began taking up the smoking cakes, but did it mechanically. Mechanically also I "called" Miss Tring, the gentle, pale-faced teacher who lodged with us; for the reference to the bush had brought foremost in my mind again the question of the cut timber, and the wonder as to whether we too, like the Jamiesons and the Carmichaels, were to have a raising.

No sooner, then, were we seated at the table and had well begun on the cakes and syrup, than I brought forward the important query:

"Father, are we going to build a barn this year?"

My father half raised his brows. "Why, no, child. What put that notion into your head?"

"Oh, it was only *wood* you cut, then." I returned, disappointed.

"Wood! Where? I cut no wood last winter."

"Well then, somebody did," I declared decisively, "for I saw the stumps all new cut, right in the edge of our bush."

My father laid down his knife and fork with a puzzled air.

"Where? What are you talkin' about?" he said, in his short, half-annoyed way.

"Why, a lot of trees cut, just inside our fence, across from where Carmichaels cut theirs," I replied.

Instantly my father's face darkened with the cloud that, when it appeared at all, lay not only upon him but upon all of us, for my father, many as were the virtues that he possessed, had not yet learned that one of holding himself in leash for the well-feeling of others. Seeing it, I glanced quickly and half fearfully to my mother and saw that she too was watching him with a sort of growing dread in her face. What she should dread I knew not. That she did dread something I felt intuitively.

My father half rose from the table, and my mother ventured to remonstrate with him.

"Come, Robert, eat yer cakes," she said, in the conciliating tone by which I ever knew that some important matter was at stake. "Don't pay too much attention to the child. What does a child know about sich things?"

But my father, without a word, reached for his hat.

With that, old Chris who had been cramming the pancakes into his mouth with a speed that betokened some unusual agitation of mind which required an outlet in some species of manual labour, found voice.

"Sit down, man, sit down," he sputtered in his rich, strong voice. "What on airth do ye want to go rammin' yer head into barn doors before they're opened fer ye, for? Dash it, man, sit down, 'n' eat yer supper, 'n' don't be suspectin' mischief so it comes between you 'n' yer stomach!"

But my father was already out of the door and was striding off down the little path with a decision that meant something must happen.

"He's off now to see about it," said my mother, half fretfully, "'n' not three bites of his cakes in his mouth! Why couldn't ye hold yer tongue"—to me—"till after supper?"

With that my mother, with her usual facility, dismissed the subject; but Chris sat for the rest of the meal, with a troubled look on his face. As for me, I could not well make

out what such a disturbance could all be about, and as soon as Chris went out after supper I seized the opportunity to question him.

"What's the matter, Chris?" I said. "Why did father get so angry and go off without his supper?"

But Chris would vouchsafe me no satisfaction.

"Grant that an empty stomach 'll be all that 'll come out of it," he muttered, going on to attend to his chores.

As for the pale little teacher, she had spoken not a word at all, and shortly after the dishes had been cleared away, with a cover or two left for my father, she went away upstairs to her room.

CHAPTER III

THE QUARREL BY THE ELDERBERRY BUSHES

IT WAS almost dark before I saw anything of my father again, although, feeling that I had been in some way responsible for the trouble, I watched for him anxiously. When I came at last upon him it was unexpectedly, at the great clump of elderberry bushes which grew, close by the road, at the line fence between Carmichael's farm and ours.

I had been sent on an errand to Mrs. Might's, and was hurrying back with all speed; for a thunderstorm was muttering in the southwest, and I had all the fear of a nervous, highly-wrought child of the great storms which sometimes swept over our hill country, crashing from wood to wood, and setting the little rills a-rushing like mad things down the hillsides and over the roads.

Just as I ascended the little rise in the road

at the ending of Carmichael's farm, the sound of a loud and angry voice arrested my attention.



Looking to the point whence it came I saw first my father. He was standing very still, close to the tall bushes, now in full bloom, with both hands on the fence, head thrown back, and that indescribable look about eyes and mouth which was always there when he had come to an irrevocable decision; but his face was as white, almost, as the great discs of bloom shining, above his head, against the green leaves.

Upon the other side of the fence, and this was the sight that struck terror to my soul, was the huge, burly form of Henry Carmichael, his hat on the back of his head, his big fist describing sledge-hammer blows on the top fence-rail by way of punctuation to his words. His great voice was raised to its highest pitch—why is it that people in a temper invariably speak loudest those words which, in saner moments, they would be most shamed to say at all?—and every word cut the air to my ear, so that I stopped, my

heart almost ceasing to beat, my feet afraid to move.

"You black-faced hypocrite!" he was shouting, accompanying the opprobrium with a torrent of oaths, "You whited sepulchre with yer prayers, 'n' yer tenth to the church, 'n' yer skulkin' dirty heart full o' suspicion of every body! D'ye think *I* took yer timber? —*Me*, that wouldn't have a smell of you or yours on the place?—Ye dirty little"—stopping as though stuck for words sufficiently descriptive of my father's vileness—"If ye weren't sich a blank little insignificant rat I'd mop the dirt with ye! Only good soil's too good to be fouled with ye! The like o' *you*, to go thievin' men's characters, 'n' then go accusin' them like a saint o' stealin' yer dirty trash!"

My father had listened without moving a muscle, but at the first pause he spoke.

"Ye know well, Henry Carmichael," he said in clear, even tones, "that I came straight to you when I had anything to say. Ye needn't think ye'll scare me with all yer bluster. I came only when I had good reason."

"Then, by Heaven, ye 'll prove what ye say!" shouted Carmichael, shaking his fist in my father's face.

But my father neither shifted an inch, nor changed one tone of his cold, haughty voice.

"There's a thing called circumstantial evidence," he said, "which is powerful enough fer many a man to have been hung on it."

For an instant Carmichael stood like a statue, glaring at my father, and half leaning forward like an animal about to spring. I saw his hands clench, and the frozenness of my terror was broken.

"Oh, father, father!" I cried, and the ground scarcely seemed to touch my feet as I flew to him.

He took me into his arms, and I threw mine about his neck, sobbing wildly.

The first sound distinguishable as my terrified excitement abated somewhat, was Carmichael's voice, but how changed.

"For Heaven's sake, Mallory," it was saying, "the little lass is scared out of her wits. Carry her home."

"No," returned my father, placing me on

the ground, "I'll have it out with you, Carmichael, here and now. You'll make the little lass no excuse to get rid o' *me*. Here now, Peggie, stop cryin' and run off home."

When my father commanded there was no disobeying; but I clung to him for a moment, still sobbing. Then I rubbed my eyes with my apron and dared to take a look at Carmichael. He was leaning on the fence looking down at me, and something in his face emboldened me to speak.

"But ye'll not strike father?" I said.

"Strike yer father?" he answered, "No, child, no; I wouldn't strike yer father. Ye poor little mite, don't think that."

Reassured, I could wait no longer, and again my feet flew, over the fence, across the fields, up the stairs and into my own room where, kneeling at the open window I could still see the two men by the elderberry bushes.

I have since thought, sometimes, that if grown people understood the abject terror with which little children listen to a fierce quarrel, they would be very careful about

permitting them to be witnesses to it. To the child there is something unnatural in angry words and gestures, something terrifying, as in floods and hurricanes. Being neither old enough nor experienced enough to detect the vast number of trivialities which, after all, are mixed in with most storms of this nature, he looks on the whole occurrence as a great calamity. There must have been some terrible cause for such angry looks and words; there will surely be some terrible outcome to it all. And he, in his helplessness, what can he do but look coweringly on?

But it is so easy for us to forget the thoughts and emotions of childhood. Looking at life from the eyes of maturity we never stop to think that the hillocks which appear to us are the Himalayas of the child-world; and so we go on heedlessly, all unmindful of the little feet that must climb, and the little hearts that so often tremble.

I suppose I was not long at the window that evening, for when I left it the green light had not all departed from the fields and the hills; but it seemed to me hours and hours in

which I knelt there watching my father and Carmichael, with the cloud from the south-west all shot intermittently with the quick, tremulous glow of the lightning, ever rising above their heads, and the low mutter of the thunder growing every moment more distinct. I remember, too, the sickening dread which overwhelmed me lest my father and his enemy should not have left off their quarrelling before it had come very close. Had not Elijah called down fire from Heaven to convince wicked men? And could any of those men of the olden time have been more wicked than this Henry Carmichael whose blasphemous words were still in my ears? True, there was now no prophet to call down fire from the skies or bears from the wood, but might not the lightning be just a more modern and convenient method of dispensing punishment on occasion? It was comforting at least to think that my father had never used such wicked language, and that consequently he stood a good chance of escape, but then, poor Dick! Was not Henry Carmichael *his* father? And at the

thought of how Dick would feel when his father was brought in all blackened and burned by the lightning my tears flowed afresh.

At last, unable to bear the suspense longer, I left my post by the window and went to look for old Chris. He was sitting, as usual when his work was done, at the end of the stoop, and to-night was busy smoothing with sandpaper a new axe-handle that he had made. I crept round behind him so he would not know that I had been crying.

"Chris," I said, "do you think it's going to be a very bad storm?"

It was my usual question when a thunder storm was approaching, and, had my voice sounded as usual, would by no means have surprised Chris. As it was, however, he drew me around and looked in my face.

"Why, dash it, little girl," he said, "cryin', were ye? Why, no, I thinks it 's goin' to pass right by to the south'ard of us. Ye ain't so scared as that o' the thunder, are ye?"

"But don't you think it 's coming right up

near to—to where father 'n' Mr. Carmichael are?" I said.

He glanced across the field, then, taking up his axe-handle again, began rubbing it vigorously.

"Pity it wouldn't," he said, "'n' give 'em both a pair o' wet jackets! The idea o' two men standin' there yammerin' over what neither one 'll give in to, 'n' nobody knows about!"

"But it's an awful storm. Do you think father 'll be caught?" I insisted.

"So, little one," he answered, more gently, "ye think yer father 'd be safer in than out there wastin' words. Don't worry, little one; that storm 'll not come any nearer this night, 'n' yer father 'll be in soon, safe and sound, I 'll warrant ye!"

Reassured I sat down on the bench close to Chris, so close that presently, when he began speaking in a low tone, so low that I knew he was talking, as he sometimes did, to himself, and had forgotten all about me, I heard every word that he said.

He was again looking across to the elder-

berry bushes, and soon he began to rub his bare stubbly chin slowly and ruminatingly.

"Dash it!" he said, shaking his head from side to side half mournfully, "it's a sore pity, them two, the one mistakin' the other, 'n' the other mistakin' the one! 'N' it's good grain there is on the one side as well as the other, 'n' neither'll see it for lookin' all the time at a cockle-seed or two. 'N' which hes the biggest cockle-seed? Why, dash it, don't ask *me!*"

Chris's metaphors often bothered me, yet I invariably knew when he was speaking in metaphor. This time I made a prodigious effort to understand what he might mean, for I recognised that, in some way, he was referring to my father and Henry Carmichael; but I could not settle the matter to my own satisfaction, so asked him presently, "What do you mean, Chris?"

He turned to me in a surprised way, as if just aware of my presence, then began smoothing the axe-handle again.

"About what?" he asked.

"About the cockle-seed."



"Why," he said, rubbing his chin again, "why, dash it, can't I talk about cockle-seed if I like?"

But I was not to be put aside so.

"Did you mean anything like—oh you know —about the mote in your brother's eye when there 's a beam in your own?"

Chris smiled grimly, and looked long into my face.

"Why, dash it, little one," he said at last, "I don't believe ye 're a baby any longer!"

"Why, no, I should say not! I 'm eleven!" I returned, "But, Chris?"

"Well?"

"You think Mr. Carmichael's far wickeder than father, don't you? Father never swears, you know."

Chris gave his head a scratch, then took to scrubbing the handle with a right good will.

"Dash it," he said, "I wish ye wouldn't be alwus askin' questions! Yer father's a good man, straight 'n' honest, 'n' I hope that 's what his little girl 'll alwus be. Mr. Carmichael hes his good points too. Don't you ever go to thinkin' he hasn't. Most folks hes

their good points, 'n' don't you ever go to gettin' so much dust on yer glasses as not to see it. It's that same dust that causes a good deal o' the misery o' this world, little girl."

"But, Chris, swearing 's very wicked, isn't it?"

Slowly Chris laid the axe-handle down, then, clasping his hands about his knee, looked off toward the elderberry bushes whence my father was now slowly returning.

"Surely it 's not right to swear," said he, "an' I'm thinkin' when a man gets enough o' the grace o' God in his heart, he 's glad enough to lay it aside fer good 'n' all. But I have sometimes been thinkin' swearin' isn't altogether shut up jist to the words that comes out of a man's mouth. The Bible says, swear not at all; 'n' the Bible 's a grand guide fer us all. I'm not jist sure o' the kind o' swearin' it meant jist there—mebbe they did swearin' different, as well as other things in them days—but if it meant all round cursin' like what Henry Carmichael there does off 'n' on, why I'm thinkin' mebbe it was hittin' jist as much at what's behind the words as at the words



themselves. Ye see I'm thinkin' a good deal o' the swearin 's about like when I say 'Dash it.' Fer example, if I was mad enough I could make 'Dash it' pretty bad swearin'— 'n' hev' mebbe, lots o' times—'n' if I didn't say 'Dash it', at all, but jist felt ugly enough 'n' mean enough, why that 'ud be swearin' too, jist as wicked swearin' mebbe, as when a man uses big soundin' words like them Henry Carmichael says. Mind ye, I'm not sayin' swearin's ever right or nice, fer it ain't, but I'm jist tryin' to say my thought that mebbe the man that doesn't swear 's sometimes as bad as the one that does, 'n' without further knowledge o' them there's no reason fer settin' the one down at the gate o' Heaven 'n' the other at the gate o' Hell. . . . Ay, it 's a funny world, this is," rubbing his chin again in a puzzled way, "'n' it's hard to keep a grip on things, but I'm thinkin' after all it's the kindly open heart, 'n' the tryin' to do what's fair 'n' straight that counts most 'n' tricks o' the tongue that comes second. A good deal o' them things is just habit mebbe, or carelessness, or want of ever stoppin' to think

jist how ugly 'n' senseless it sounds. But mind, I ain't sayin' swearin's kind or right; 'n' as I said afore, when a man's got enough o' the real grace o' God in his heart he ain't likely to swear much. But then his heart'll be sweet 'n' kind, too, 'n' he'll not be swearin' away down in it, neither."

This long speech of Chris's puzzled me. In some way it seemed to be upsetting much of the distinction I had formed, or been trained to form, between the marks by which the good and the evil were to be known, and of late, somehow, I was beginning to set much store by Chris's opinion of things. But as yet such a problem was beyond my powers of mental digestion, hence, after a confused attempt to follow out his reasoning, I gave up, and, laying down my head on the old man's shoulder, watched my father drawing nearer and the thunder-clouds passing quickly toward the southeast, with a sense of thankfulness that a terrible crisis had gone.

"You know so much about things, Chris," I said. "Do you think I'll know as much when I'm old like you?"

But the old man shuffled his feet, as he often did when somewhat confused, and set to work again sand-papering his axe-handle.

"Tut, tut, little one," he said. "Ye got me into it, ye did. It's not fer an old man like me to be sittin' up here in judgment on things, 'n' mebbe me own two eyes chock full o' beams! But, dash it, ye will keep askin' questions! Why don't ye ask yer father or Miss Tring?"

As my father passed us, his countenance looked no more disturbed than usual, and he stopped to pat me on the head.

Thankful for this mark of his forgiveness and favour, my light heart returned again, and I went asleep that night feeling that my father was a very good and very much injured man indeed, and that, no matter what Chris might say, Mr. Carmichael was very, very wicked, and the words he had used very wicked words indeed.

CHAPTER IV

THE RAISING

NOT long after this the "bids," as we called them, to the raising of Jamieson's barn were sent out. There had been much talk of the immense proportions which this prospective barn was to assume; and every Sunday night for weeks, the spot upon which the foundations were being laid and the timbers gathered had been the rendezvous for all the young men of the neighbourhood, who sat about on the logs and lumber piles, gossiped, and made eye-measurements with much sagacity until "meetin'-time" in the little church at the corner (dignified by the name of "Oroway Centre"), had arrived. The passing of our meek little preacher's white horse was usually the signal for a general departure, and, as a rule, the lads, each with a marigold in his button-hole, arrived at the church when the first hymn was given out,

sidled bashfully into the back seats, and as bashfully out again, to reappear in brave company in the semicircle which awaited the coming of the lasses from the church door. The courage which the lads displayed in this proceeding was remarkable, yet the waiting semicircle had come to be something of an institution at our church, like the collection or the benediction, and, indeed, among the young people it had come to be thought something of a belittlement to a young man if he had not his "girl," and his place in the phalanx at the gate. "Guess he can't git anybody to go with him," was an imputation as much dreaded among our boys as the appellation of thief or pickpocket.

However, all this is neither here nor there, for it is of Jamieson's barn we should be speaking. Many were the tales of it brought by our lads after these Sunday night visits, and retailed with much gusto, first to the favoured lassie on the way home, then to the parents, hers and his, later. Such foundations, such timbers, had never been seen in Oroway township—such plates, such beams,

such rafters! And many were the speculations as to how they would "go up," and whether Bill Gilliland, the "framer" whose contract the building was, would be able to carry the affair through without accident. Should he manage to do so, it was unanimously conceded, the event would be the crowning success of his life.

When the "bids" were at last issued, talk ran wild again, especially when it was learned that the men from Atterill, ten miles away, had been "asked."

By some the news was hailed with satisfaction; there would be at least plenty of men to do the work, and no danger of hitch for want of the necessary muscle. By the others the scattering of such far and wide invitations was condemned. The men would be running over one another, these averred, and what with the noise and confusion Bill Gilliland would have more than his hands full.

But the excitement among the men was nothing to that which prevailed among the women, especially among those who were Mrs. Jamieson's immediate neighbours. Every

one was anxious to help, and while Mrs. Jamieson's cellar was being rapidly transformed into the semblance of a veritable pastry shop, Mrs. Jamieson's reeking kitchen was filled with the whisk of skirts and gabble of voices, while poor meek little Mrs. Jamieson timidly gave way to the onslaught, assenting to everything, and humbly taking unto herself the office of stoker and oven-tender by the hot stove.

"I declare to gracious!" my mother exclaimed, after a solitary visit which came to a hasty termination, "If Mrs. Jamieson ever gits through this raisin' with all her wits it'll be a wonder! Sich a kitchen!—full o' women, 'n' flies and laughin'—'n' some o' them mad! I'd hardly got in the gate when Maria Hall came up to me grumblin' that Amanda Might was goin' around, as she said, with her head up, like a steer in a corn-patch, orderin' everything, 'jist as if Mrs. Jamieson wasn't there pokin' wood into the stove.' Fer my part, I wouldn't mind comin' under Amanda Might, fer she *knows;* but it's the confusion that 'ud make me addle-headed! I'm as

anxious to help Bell Jamieson as anyone, but I'll do it in my own house in peace 'n' quietness."

So saying, she uncovered a basket which she had brought with her, disclosing a supply of eggs, butter, and all the other necessities for the cake making which employed her for the rest of the afternoon.

When the momentous day came we were all in good time at the Jamieson homestead. Just to peep into the cellar with its shelves laden with cakes, pies, and tartlets, and beautifully trimmed with "valances" of white paper cut into patterns, was to me as good as a glimpse into fairyland; while to watch the women and girls arriving at the house dressed all in their "best," and the men gathering in dozens about the stone foundations and the lying timbers, while the horses tugged at beams and their owners whoa'd and haw'd, was certainly better than a fair, and almost as interesting as a circus.

Ever a little shy among many people, however, I climbed up on a lumber-pile by the gate and sat there, seeing and enjoying

everything, the animated scene about me, the sun-steeped fields beyond, and everywhere the glad blue and green of the summer. It perhaps detracted nothing from my pleasure that, from time to time, I could hear the silvery notes of a meadow-lark coming up like a thin quaver of liquid music, from a neighbouring meadow as though to remind me that, even though I were in the midst of all this life and bustle, not far off were the great solitudes, peopled only with the birds and the shy little beasts and fuzzy creeping things that I loved. I found myself waiting in the intervals for that silvery song, and for a long time not once did I miss it. I doubt much if anyone else heard it even once, but then perhaps no one else that day could have understood my Paradise.



Then, presently, Gay Torrance came, in a white frock frilled to the waist, with blue ribbons on her shoulders and on her flaxen curls. She was late in coming because, as usual, the frills had to be ironed, and then it had taken Mrs. Torrance a very long time to make the bows "set" properly. Mrs. Torrance



looked very tired, but very proud, too, whenever she looked at Gay, who began dancing around as she ever did, as light of foot as any fairy.

I did not get down off my lumber-pile when Gay came, but I remember watching her and thinking that she laughed a great deal too much, and that she was very silly when she kept running around after Dick Carmichael and Hud Jamieson, tugging at their jacket tails, then running off to be "chased." I was a little disgusted with Dick for chiming in with her foolishness so readily, and thought that he was much more interesting when he was walking fences or climbing trees; but I contented myself by thinking that, after all, I must be a rather superior little girl since I felt so above running around like a baby and tugging at coat-tails.

Nevertheless I could not help seeing that every one noticed Gay. The men all had a word for her, and the women all praised her beauty, while scarcely a one seemed to notice me, the little gray-clad figure with the straight, black locks and the elfin, black eyes, sitting so quietly on the lumber-pile.

More than once, it is true, I overheard some of the women who kept continually coming out at the gate to see how things were progressing, say to my mother, "What! Is that your little girl? How dark she is! And how straight her hair! Not a bit like you," or some such words.

Mrs. Might, too, remarked to my mother within my hearing that she liked to see children dressed "sensible" like me, and not "fol-de-roled up to the neck like that Gay Torrance." But such notice as this was very different to the attention Gay was receiving.

I tried to imagine myself in a frilled dress with blue ribbons; but imagination could not endow me with fairy ringlets and dancing blue eyes, and so I presently found myself wishing that I had been pretty like Gay, and wondering if beautiful people were always petted and favoured and loved more than homely ones, and if always and always their way would be the happier.



For the first time in my life, there amid the bustle and the laughter and jesting I began to feel utterly, miserably alone. The feeling



was such as comes sometimes to one who has been thrown into a great city alone, uncared for, far from home and friends, and who, wandering along strange streets, looks in through the windows into brilliantly lighted rooms where pleasant, home scenes, smiling faces, and animated gestures but serve to twit him with his loneliness. Perhaps there was a little of jealousy in the gnawing at my heart that beautiful afternoon, but, after all, is not the root of jealousy but the longing to be loved?

I remember yet the great rush of feeling that came to my timid, lonely little heart when an arm stole gently round me, so gently that I knew, before I looked up into the sweet, pale face, that it belonged to Miss Tring.

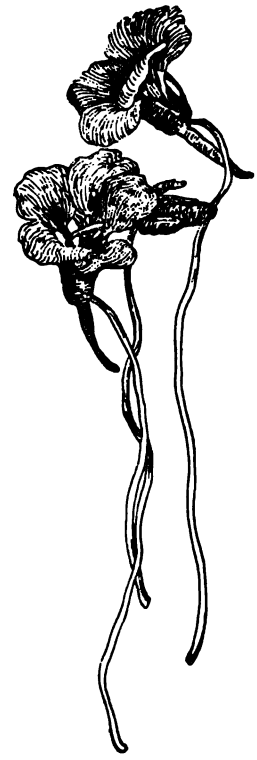
I have said little as yet of Miss Tring, the gentle teacher who had come to live with us, and who, gliding in and out among our people, quietly as moves the south wind through the groves in spring, was gradually but surely bringing refinement into our homes, and smoothing the roughness out from our speech. Among us children, perhaps, was her

influence in this last respect most patent, and yet it was on record that, after each of her visits, even Amanda Might for three consecutive days remembered to sound her "ings."

It may, perhaps, be mentioned as characteristic of Miss Tring, that at her touch also, as at that of the south wind, flowers seemed to spring up all but spontaneously. The yard about the little brown school house at the "Centre" which, before her time, had been a desolation consecrated to thistles and burdocks among which little bare feet did daily penance, not long after her coming began to burst forth into bloom of a different quality, and ere two years had passed posies might be gathered there at any season of the year, tulips and narcissus in spring, June lilies later, and last of all sweet peas and nasturtiums, asters and petunias in all the riotous colouring of mid-summer and autumn blossoming.



It was noteworthy also—and even more noteworthy that old Yorkie Dodd, who seldom paid attention to such things, should have noticed it—how the flowers seemed to spread



from the school yard, making their appearance first of all in the gardens of those living nearest it, than in those farther away with a system and regularity which constrained old Yorkie to say, giving utterance to the one brilliant speech of his life, "Flowers is like measles—*ketchin'*." But neither Yorkie Dodd, nor, perhaps, anyone else, fully realised how much of this "ketchingness" was due to Miss Tring's personal endeavour and suggestion, a slip here, a few seeds there, a "wouldn't you like to send for a catalogue?" and so on, until in all the district about Oroway Centre there was no home without its garden and its pot of winter bloom. Our people appreciated Miss Tring, and most of all, perhaps, we children who lived with her in the little brown schoolhouse, and so knew her best of all; and none among the circle loved her more than I.

When she put her arm around me that day on the lumber-pile, I could have thrown mine about her, and sobbed aloud for the very relief of her touch; but instead I only looked up into her sweet, sympathetic face

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and whispered, "Oh Miss Tring, *you* love me, don't you?"

"*I* love you! why yes, dear, of course I love you," she said, tightening her hold on me. "Why do you ask such a thing?"

But instead of answering her I just let my head drop on her shoulder, and began to cry quietly, wiping the tears away with my little, red-edged handkerchief. And so I sat with Miss Tring gently smoothing my hair, until a big voice that I knew said, "How d' ye do, Miss Tring? Fine day for the raisin', isn't it? Why, what's the matter with the little girl? Sick, is she?"

"Just a little lonely, I think," said Miss Tring, as I hid my face more closely against her.

But a big hand was laid on my head to turn my face about.

"Why, it's Mallory's little gipsy!" said the big voice again, and I jerked away angrily. What right had Henry Carmichael to see me cry, and what right had he to call me a little gipsy?

"Peggy, Peggy, what's the matter?" said

Miss Tring repoachfully; but I leaned against her, safe within the protection of her encircling arm, and looked out my defiance at Henry Carmichael. He was looking at me with a curious, half-pitying smile; but he did not speak to me, only turned away in a moment and went down toward the barn where, presently, I saw him playing with Gay Torrance, pulling her curls, and snatching her hat off while she danced about him and sprang after it laughing in glee. Well, she might play with Mr. Carmichael if she chose. He was a wicked man, and he had sworn at my father and called me a gipsy.

In a moment, however, my attention was fully taken up, and I forgot to be miserable. The captains had been chosen, and the picking of the sides had begun, the general noise and confusion ceasing as the names of the contestants sounded forth loud and clear. My father and Henry Carmichael, I noticed, were chosen on opposite sides, as though even in this they were fated to oppose each other; and then I looked to find Bill Gilliland, upon whom, it seemed, so much was to

depend. He was standing a little to one side, his face full of anxiety.

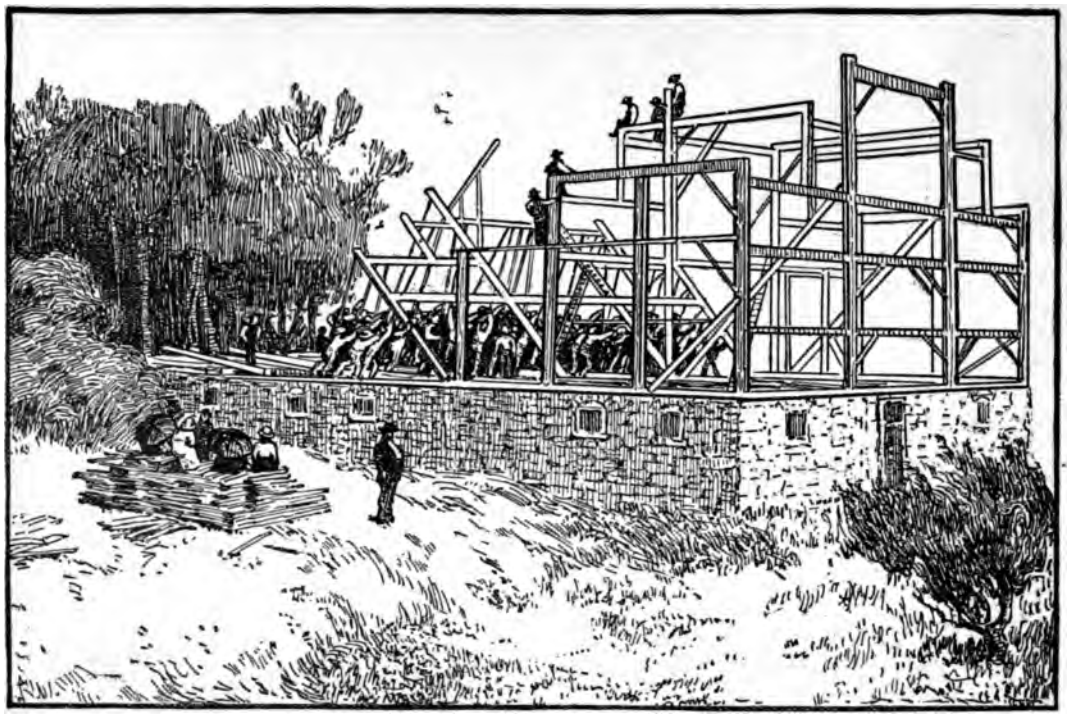
The very instant after the last man was chosen, the word was given, and there was a general rush, some seizing the "pike-poles" with which the first bent was to be raised, while as many as could laid hold upon the great frame work, and with some desultory "yeo-heaving," raised it into position and blocked it in place where it could be more conveniently handled.

Then, like bees, the whole force swarmed upon the pike-poles, gripping them until hands lay in long lines, knuckle to knuckle almost throughout the entire length, while faces were expectantly turned toward the edge of the bent which was to be lifted.

For a moment there was a clamour of voices amid which nothing could be distinguished, while Bill Gilliland stood frantically waving his arms and contorting his face in a hopeless endeavour to be heard.

"Shut-up, boys!" some one roared. It was Henry Carmichael. "Give Gilliland a show!"

Almost instantly there was silence, and



"'Now then, men, ready! Yeo-heave!'"



Gilliland's countenance cleared. The next moment his voice could be heard shouting his commands in a clear, self-possessed tone.

"Now then, men, ready! Yeo-heave!" And the men began to lift, steadily, without confusion, for the racing had not yet begun, and the united efforts of all was being put forth to raise the huge frame work.

"Yeo-heave! Yeo-heave!" and the bent began to leave the ground, the long row of glistening pikes now appearing above the heads of the men swarmed below, and lengthening at every "heave."

"Yeo-heave!" "Yeo-heave!"

Steadily the bent is going up, the great timbers mounting higher and higher like a vast clumsy network against the blue sky, with men clinging like spiders, here and there, to the meshes, and men pressing closer and ever closer below, just as though a huge mass of beams and poles were not swaying and creaking above.

Eagerly I searched for my father, and at last descried him, riding calmly up on the very topmost timber of the bent.

For a moment I caught my breath in the fear that he might lose his hold, or the bent might drop. The next instant his calmness reassured me, and I felt a throb of exultation. This feat of riding up there, so quietly, so recklessly, surely put my father on a level with huge and strong men, like that mighty man of the woods, Henry Carmichael, whom I could see straining with shoulders bent like a great buffalo in the very thick of the "pike-pole" men. And was it not much more creditable to be up there riding into the sky than in safer places such as out there at the very end of the corner pike-pole, where fat old Yorkie Dodd with his big stomach, and lean Jim Jamieson were puttering away without seeming to be of much use to anyone at all. Mr. Jamieson, I thought, looked somewhat frightened, and I wondered what there could be to be afraid of in that spot.

"Why doesn't your father go in a hard place up on top, or far in among the rest?" I said, rather brutally, to Hud Jamieson, who, with Gay Torrance, had clambered up on the lumber-pile beside me.

"Huh!" he retorted, "Everybody can't go in far, silly!"

"It's his barn," I maintained, "'n' he ought to go in the dangerous places."

But I did not catch Hud's reply, for the bent had at last shot into place perpendicularly, and a general clamour of voices, hammering of mallets, and rushing about, was preceding the pushing up of the second bent.

"Which side's ahead?" I asked, somewhat puzzled to know just how things were progressing, but Hud looked at me with unmixed contempt.

"Why no side's ahead yet, silly! That's just like girls! The racing doesn't begin until the purline plates go up!"

"Oh!" I said, quite apologetically, then settled myself back against Miss Tring tc wait for the beginning of the race.

Very interesting, I thought it was, to watch bent after bent go slowly up, then settle into place with a sort of dull shock, and very beautiful, for, as the raising went on, the sun was sinking lower and lower, and the red light from it, spreading over fields, and hill,

and forest, was striking the new white timbers into streaks and bars of gold, upon which the men hung in spots and clusters of russet, and gray, and ebon black.

With the raising of the last bent, in order to see more distinctly, we left our place on the lumber-pile, and moved nearer to the barn.

"Now the fun's going to begin! Whoop!" shouted Dick, coming up to us for the first time.

But I, at least, was hardly prepared for the pandemonium which succeeded. Scarcely had the bent reached its position and the girts been put in, when the word was sounded, "Now boys, fer yer plates!" and there was a general race from all directions toward the huge purline plates which lay in two shining streaks on the ground. Everyone seemed to be shouting at once, and in the general confusion Bill Gilliland seemed to be of no more account than the lark in the meadow.

I watched my father who was high up, hammering away with a mallet, and heard someone shout to him to "Let down that chain!"



Instantly he threw the mallet from him. It cut the air with a curve like a meteor, and as it neared the ground big Henry Carmichael stepped out from beneath a leaning timber, not far from me and directly in the way of the mallet.

"Look out! Look out!" shouted half a dozen voices, but almost too late. At the same instant Carmichael put his hand to his forehead and half staggered. Two or three men ran forward, while my father stood, seemingly paralysed, at the top of the bent, notwithstanding a score of voices which kept shouting to him to let down the chain.

When Carmichael took his hand away a thin stream of blood could be seen oozing its way down his face.

"It's only a scratch," he said, waving the men who had run up to him away.

"Only a scratch," repeated one. "But holy Moses, if it had struck an inch further back you were done for, Carmichael!"

"Who threw it?"

"Mallory."

With that the man ran off, but Carmichael

looked slowly up to my father who, all dazed it seemed, had not yet moved.

For an instant the two looked steadily into each other's faces, and there was in Carmichael's a look, more bitter by a hundredfold than had been upon it in the quarrel by the elderberry bushes.

Breathlessly I watched him, my ears strained to hear, and when he raised his great fist and shook it at my father not a word missed me.

"You meant that, Mallory, and, by Heaven, I'll get even with you!"

With that he walked off, and my father, the spell broken, in answer to the voices which were threatening to throw him down if he didn't wake up, let down a huge chain which was instantly drawn about the end of the purline plate.

Upon the other side, for the whole occurrence had but taken a few moments—far less time than I have taken to tell it—the yeo-heaving was just beginning. But just now I had little interest in the race. Tremulously I looked at Dick who was standing beside me.

"Don't be scared," he said, "father's bark is worse than his bite."

And then he did a rather strange thing for a lad of his years. With a smile he held out his hand to me, and quite solemnly I laid mine in it. He grasped it for a second firmly, and in some sort of way I felt that the grasp was the seal to a compact that, come what might, Dick would still be my friend. An instant later he was off, and presently I saw him running about among the timbers of the barn and clambering up posts and along beams as this one or that beckoned him to bring something. As for Hud, he was bravely explaining the ins and outs of the race, which was now in full swing, to Gay Torrance.

Of the details of the race, in such an uproar I could distinguish but little, but by the time the plates were up and the rafters had been run into place I had recovered my good spirits enough to be able to jump and clap my hands when it appeared that, after all, the side upon which my father had been chosen had won.

And now the men, with old Yorkie Dodd toddling on far in the lead, were setting out

on a run for the house, where the tables were set in long array out of doors, and the girls and women were bustling about with pitchers of hot tea. But I turned to look once more at the great skeleton of the barn. The lower part of it was now quite in shade, and the timbers, bereft of their recent gold, looked pallid enough. But upon the rafters above, the beams of the sun still lingered, and each shone blood-red like a streak of fire. Beyond them again the sky was fast softening into twilight, and upon it sailed one fleecy coral cloud. From the copse beyond the meadow a whip-poor-will was already trilling its weird, wild song.

"It's a blessin' it went up so well," said some one near me, "never a hitch, nor a man hurt only that bit of a scrape Carmichael got. Who threw the maul? Mallory, did ye say?"

"Yes, Mallory. Carmichael said he meant to do it, but Lord save us! Mallory 'ud never do a trick like that!"

"Oh, no. All the same, if Carmichael was a size or two smaller them two 'ud come to blows yet."

So saying the men passed on to the house, and I followed, thinking what a grand story about everything I should have to tell Chris when we went home.

* * * * *

Under the full moon that night, Yorkie Dodd, sitting by Chris on his bench, recounted in his halting drawl the story of the raising, dwelling with much fervour on the excellence of the "blow out" (feast) with which it had closed.

"Oh, aye," he concluded, "that's where ye miss the wimmen—in the cookin'. My wife's gone now three years Easter. She was powerful handy about the house, my missis was. Aye, that's where ye miss the wimmen, in the cookin' and bakin'."

"But dash it, man, ye don't surely value a woman jist fer the cookin' she does!" exclaimed Chris.

Yorkie shook his head slowly and sadly. "There's other things, sure, but wimmen's powerful handy fer the cookin' 'n' bakin'!"

"But there's yer boy, now," said Chris, encouragingly. "Sure, I hear great news of

him, how he cooks yer meals, 'n' works like any man outside, as well."

Yorkie brightened visibly.

"Oh, aye," he said, "Sandy's a good lad as ever was, 'n' his mother over again, but," ruefully again, "he's not up to her wi' the cookin'."

"Why don't ye hunt up another woman?" asked Chris. But Yorkie evidently did not detect the chaffing.

"Wha-t?" he exclaimed, perplexed.

"Why don't ye hunt up a woman to cook fer ye?"

Yorkie hitched with becoming modesty.

"Well, now," he drawled, "it's queer I never thought o' that. Mebbe a wumman isn't so easy to find, but I'll think on't, Christopher—I'll think on't." And with that he got up and shuffled off toward home as though he had been called upon to face a matter which required immediate decision.

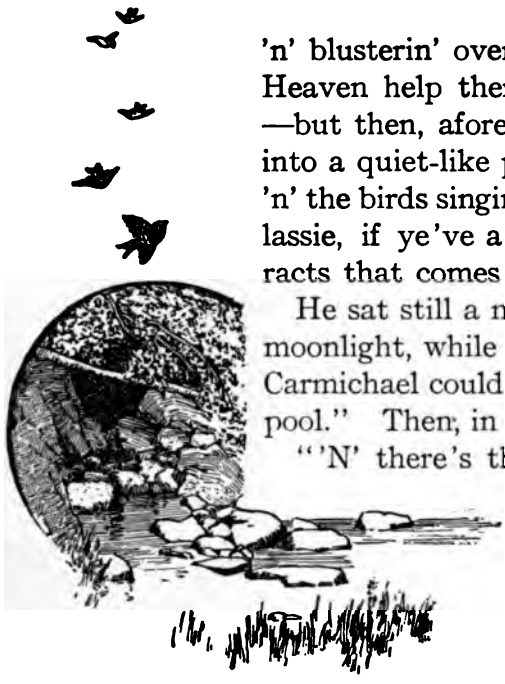
"Dash it! What hev' I done now!" exclaimed Chris, looking after him as he disappeared in the moonlight. "If I've set him on to some poor 'wumman'! But dash it, sure

it'll be her own fault if she takes him!" and with that he dismissed the subject, as though satisfied to be rid of the responsibility.

I slid on to the bench beside him, saying nothing, for I saw that he was about to speak again. Presently he began in that low, easy way in which he often talked when I was near, partly, no doubt, to me, but a great deal more to himself.

Before he got through I knew that he was dwelling on the incidents of the raising as told by Yorkie, and more especially on that in which my father had thrown down the mallet.

"Folks is queer," he said, "'n' different. Now there's them that's like an iron rod—that's yer father—straight up 'n' down, 'n' no shilly-shallying about them, ner mouldin' to other people's notions, 'n' 's long as they're set in the right all's well 'n' good. A good kind o' people, lass, 'n' one that the world hes often much need of. 'N' then there's them that's like a great river—that's Henry Carmichael—now runnin' calm 'n' smooth-like atween the meadows, 'n' now thunderin'



'n' blusterin' over the rocks in a waterfall, 'n' Heaven help them that gets mixed up in it —but then, afore ye know it, wimplin' again into a quiet-like pool, wi' the ferns noddin', 'n' the birds singin'. A good kind o' folks too, lassie, if ye've a mind to look past the cataracts that comes jist here 'n' there."

He sat still a moment, looking out into the moonlight, while I sat wondering when Henry Carmichael could possibly be like a "wimplin' pool." Then, in a tone of disgust he added,

"'N' there's them that's jist—pigs!"

CHAPTER V

"THERE'S NOBODY 'PIGS'"

IN THE interval between haying and harvest our men usually did their "statute labour" (road-work). It was a convenient time, when work was slack, but, by some fatality, usually managed to come at the very hottest of the season, when the sun beat down fiercely on the men in the gravel pits, and the very strength of the horses oozed out in the sweat that drenched their flanks and lay in lines of foam along their sides as they strained up the hills with the heavy loads which were to do good duty in gravelling our highways.

Nevertheless we children usually looked forward to the road-work time with much pleasure. It was a great satisfaction to Dick and Hud to be permitted, as they sometimes were, to drive the horses; while to Gay and me sundry jolting rides on the heavy wagons

afforded a very near approach to perfect bliss.

It was very interesting to watch the men plying their work with pick and shovel, with brown arms bared to the sun, and very pleasant indeed to listen to their talk about crops and cattle, and the whistling and chaffing with which it was interlaced; and while Gay ran about laughing and chattering to this one and that and teasing the boys, I usually sat quite still, like a mouse or rabbit under a hedge, looking out from beneath my brown straw hat with a quiet wonderment, and sizing up everything in my own way.

It seemed to me that my father must be a person of some importance, for wherever he went it was "Mister Mallory" this, and "Mister Mallory" that, while with others it was Jack, and Tom, and Bill. I noticed, too, that wherever he was the men—with the exception of Henry Carmichael, who seemed to swear more than at other times when he was near—talked gravely, with never an oath nor a coarse jest. In Carmichael's vicinity, on the other hand, there was much

laughing, and occasionally a boxing or sparring bout in which Carmichael was usually victor, throwing the men about as though they were but lads while he himself stood firm as granite.

During the road-work this year, remembering his threat of "getting even with" my father, I kept a close watch on Carmichael, but was, after a time, much relieved to find that he ignored my father's presence completely, as, indeed, my father did his.

Once, indeed, he said a bitter word that made my small fund of temper surge up until, timid as I was, it ran away with my tongue.

The men had been talking of some matter which I had not been following, but presently I caught Carmichael's words, in an indifferent tone, as though setting aside a something unworthy of notice,

"Oh—*that* long-faced devil, Mallory, was it?"

The tone as well as the words exasperated me, and I began to shed tears of bitter indignation which big Jack Hall, on whose gravel-wagon I sat, vainly endeavoured to stay.

"Why, what's the matter with the little lass?" said Carmichael, coming up.

Fiercely dashing the tears from my cheeks I burst out, "You called my father a long-faced devil, and he isn't a devil, and he *hasn't* a long face!"

Carmichael smiled in an amused way, and the smile irritated me still more. What right had Henry Carmichael to make little of me by smiling like that?

"Why, it's Mallory's little gipsy," he said, exactly as he had said at the raising. "Cryin' again? Tut, tut, little girl, don't cry—I'll take it all back again. There now, don't cry—don't cry. See, I'll take it all back."

Clenching my hands in determination to keep back the sobs I looked straight into his eyes, marvelling the while at my boldness.

"You know you are not telling the truth," I said. "You are not taking it back one bit, and I hate you!"

I could say no more, for I was ready to scream with excitement, so I clambered down from the wagon to run off to my father at the gravel-pit.

Carmichael stood for a moment curiously watching me, then before I had passed out of hearing I caught his words.

"By Jove, that's not bad! The little imp isn't so far out."

At the gravel-pit something unusual was surely happening. Horses and wagons were standing about by themselves in all directions, and in the pit itself, which the hot sun was transforming into a vast reflector, reeking back the heat and the light from sand and pebble, a little knot of men had gathered, and were grouped about some one whom they proceeded to lift and carry out to the soft, green clover field near by.

Dick Carmichael tore by me with a dinner pail, thowing out the dinner as he ran.

"It's Sandy Dodd!—sunstroke!" he said, and rushed on to the spring below the hill.

One by one the men, as they came back for their loads, gathered round, until all were there in a little sympathetic group, and Gay and I, watching from the level above the pit, saw my father dashing cold water on the lad's head, and loosening his clothes.

Presently some one mounted a horse bareback, and set off on a gallop, and others lifted the limp form to a democrat (sort of light wagon).

So blue-eyed, freckled-faced Sandy Dodd, who had come down in the morning whistling as gaily as the bob-o-link in the clover, went slowly home, helpless, senseless as the clods by the roadside.

There is nothing uncommon in such incidents, since people must, somehow and somewhere, be stricken, and people must somehow and somewhere die; yet wherever such an one falls it comes as a tragedy, a tragedy which makes us wonder that the sun shines, the trees wave, and the birds sing just as before.



And this marvel it is which reveals to us, sharply and distinctly, the gulf which, after all, separates human life from the merely inanimate world. We are accustomed to fancy, whether we form the fancy into words or no, that the free things of field and forest have kinship with us. We are glad, and trees wave gaily for us, the birds sing in unison with



our mood, the breezes blow with a keen, glad buoyancy; we are sad, and the waving branches mourn, the breezes sigh, and a whip-poor-will trills from a thicket. Then the great blow falls, and we see beyond the edge of the gulf. The trees which we have loved, wave, no longer a part of our lives, but things insentient, cut off from us by their incapability of sympathy; the birds sing, but even their singing, so expressive of our emotions before, has lost, in its wild, glad carolling, the thread that bound it to our hearts, for how can the free, glad birds know our sorrow? It is only when we are sentimentally glad or sentimentally sorry that the poet's words are true and nature becomes even a reflector of ourselves.

"O Lady! We receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does nature live:
Ours is her wedding-garment, ours her shroud!
And would we aught behold of higher worth,
Than that inanimate, cold world allowed
To the poor, loveless, ever-anxious crowd,
Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth,
A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud
Enveloping the earth."

In the shock of sudden joy, or above all, of sudden sorrow, we realise that there is no

such bond, and so we know that we are not of this earth alone, and then if ever, call upon God Gay and I, two children, standing up there at the top of the gravel-pit, did not, it is true, realise much of this; yet as we stood, in awed silence, watching the democrat wind slowly up the road toward Yorkie Dodd's, we felt that a terrible something had happened; a serpent had come into our Eden.

Slowly and quietly the men returned to work, for, in the country, where the sight of sickness and death is not an everyday occurrence, there is real sympathy, and the sorrow of one comes as a blow to the whole community; and for the rest of the day a whistle on "the road" would have seemed a blasphemy.

From the first there was little hope for Sandy Dodd. He never once altogether regained consciousness, although he revived enough to toss his fevered head on the pillow and cry out, "Oh, mother, my head! My head!"

His father never once left him, but sat by

the side of the bed, gazing at his son in a dazed, helpless way, and shaking his head when begged to eat or to sleep.

For three days and three nights he sat thus almost continuously; then, when the tossing head on the pillow had become very still, and the moaning lips had ceased from their unceasing plaint, the old man threw himself on the bed.

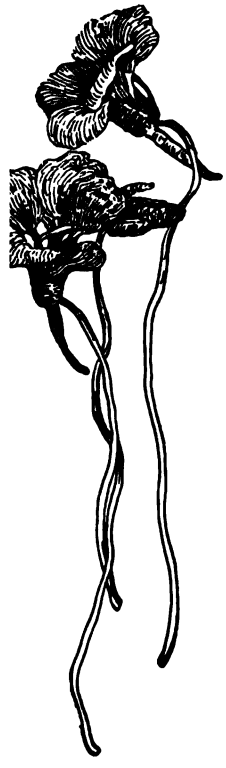
"Oh, my son, my son!"

It was the cry of David, that has rung throughout the centuries, and will ring on as long as the world lasts, without losing one jot or tittle of its agony.

After that the old man suffered himself to be led away like a little child, and the neighbour women, moving swiftly and silently about the stricken house, set everything to rights, and prepared the body for burial.

"Poor lad," said Amanda Might, rubbing a tear away, as she looked at him in his coffin, "it 'ud ha' broken his mother's heart. She was powerful proud o' Sandy. Well, well, he's with her now."

And Mrs. Torrance, with tears streaming



down her cheeks remarked how "young" people looked when they were dead, and how baby-like Sandy's mouth was, almost like that of her own little baby, who had died before Gay was born.

* * * * *

When night fell the bare little room was as clean as hands could make it, and there were flowers everywhere, roses, and marigolds, and nasturtiums, while upon the coffin, arranged by Miss Tring's slender hands, were masses of white daisies and maiden-hair. Upon the still bosom and about the head were strewn a few pansies.

"Heart's-ease," Miss Tring had said when she put them there, "and the dear heart is surely at rest."

And so we were standing, when there was nothing more to be done, the women talking in whispers, and the men with solemn faces rendered more solemn still in the light of the one shaded lamp, when the door opened and, for the first time since leaving his dead boy, old Yorkie came in.

It was enough to make one start to see him,

all bowed like a broken man, his usually plump, red face so haggard and white, and that wild, dazed look in his eyes.

He came straight to the head of the coffin, and placing both hands upon it bent lower and lower, his full weight upon it, until the men had to draw him gently away and place him in an armchair. Then one and another went to him and told him of their sympathy.

He took it all thankfully, and in a child-like way.

"Ay," he said in answer to my father, "he was a good lad. He worked fer ye once, Mr. Mallory, and ye used him well. I thank ye kindly."

And again, "Oh yes, Mr. Mallory, it's the will o' God as ye say. His will seems strange, but as ye say, it's not fer us to question the Almighty, 'n' it's all fer the best—fer him, fer my boy!"

And so he talked on, in a strange, strained voice, in which none of us recognised Yorkie Dodd.

At about ten o'clock, when nearly all the neighbours had gathered, the door was flung

wide open, and coming in at it we saw Carmichael, carrying his crippled wife in his arms.

My father set a chair for her close by Yorkie, and tenderly her husband placed her in it, with a cushion at her back. Then he and she turned to the old man at the same time. Carmichael spoke not a word, just laid his great hand on the old man's shoulders while a tear ran slowly down his cheek; but his wife, with her sweet face shining like an angel's, placed her thin hand over Yorkie's and began to speak, very clearly and kindly.

"We 're so sorry for you, Mr. Dodd. Oh, how beautiful your boy looks!"

With that Yorkie began to tremble, and looked up into Carmichael's face piteously, with the look of a wounded dog. The big tear rolling down Carmichael's cheek fell on his forehead, and with that hot drop the long, unnatural spell seemed to be broken. Quickly bowing his head upon his hands the old man wept, shaking from head to foot with the great sobs, and soon there was not a dry eye in the room. Men rubbed away surreptitious tears, looking out of the windows, or walked

hastily out of the house; women sobbed aloud, and we children wept wildly out of sympathy, clinging to our mother's skirts. After that things seemed a little easier to bear, and even Yorkie said he felt better.

In a very short time the Carmichaels went away again, but not before Mrs. Carmichael had given the forlorn old man a pressing invitation to go and stay with her and her husband for a month or two as soon as the funeral should be over.

"Thank ye kindly, ma'am, thank ye kindly," said Yorkie, "It'll be a lonesome house here."

On the way home that night I walked with old Chris, my father and mother having gone ahead. He was strangely silent all the way, and I kept looking up at the stars studded thickly over the great dome of the far-off heavens, and thinking how strange and sad everything had come to be.



Just at the creek, where the water came gurgling under the bridge and the shadows of the trees lay thick along the road, Chris spoke.

"There's nobody pigs!" he said with

unwonted vehemence. "Mind ye that, Peggie, *there's nobody pigs!*"

Poor Chris, he had done penance for the only unkind word I ever knew him to speak of anyone, and this was his absolution.

CHAPTER VI

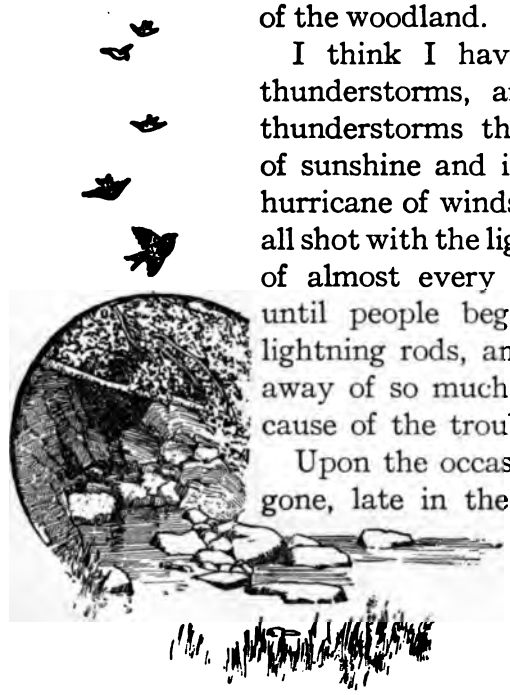
AN ADVENTURE IN THE FOREST

DURING the days which followed I did much thinking about Henry Carmichael. Almost my first thought, on awaking in the morning, was to wonder would he do anything that day by way of carrying out his threat to be even with my father; and for a good fortnight, while the wheat and oats were being cut and gathered into stooks, I stood out every day for hours watching that I might give warning on the approach of Henry Carmichael across the fields. Sometimes, indeed, I thought it rather curious that one who could be so kind to old Yorkie Dodd could be so harsh and bitter toward another; but then it was such a terrible calamity that had come upon Yorkie.

However, as the days went by and my father continued to come in regularly at mealtimes and at nights, and was never found

lying shot behind a fence or among the grain-ricks, I began to breathe more freely again, and, as Henry Carmichael seemed to have regained all his good humour, and my father never once mentioned the affair of the stolen timber in my hearing, could presently feel that a great crisis had been safely passed.

When next I met Carmichael it was at the turning of the summer, just before the first red banners of autumn began to hang out here and there from the vast green wilderness of the woodland.



I think I have mentioned my dread of thunderstorms, and, oh, what a summer of thunderstorms that was! First a few days of sunshine and intense heat, then a terrible hurricane of winds and rain, and piling clouds all shot with the lightning—that was the record of almost every week of July and August, until people began to talk of putting up lightning rods, and to wonder if the clearing away of so much of the woods were not the cause of the trouble.

Upon the occasion of which I speak, I had gone, late in the afternoon, to look for the

cows. They were not in the pasture, and so, seldom afraid in the woods, I plunged boldly into the green wilderness, with Jap bounding ahead of me in delight, and making a thousand deviations after scurrying red squirrels and other such interesting game. The woods always filled me with keen pleasure, and this evening my steps became slower and slower as I looked up through the green-gold of the leaves, all flushed with the slant, evening sunlight, and marked the red shafts of brightness that struck through, here and there, to the moist, brown earth below. It was delightful also to look at the solemn, great trunks standing up like pillars, myriads of them, as far as eye could reach, and to note the soft, green patches of maiden hair and other dainty, woodsy things, scattered here and there below as though safe in the protection of the great canopy above.

At the little brook I paused for a moment to listen to the music of the water; then, after plucking a few spikes of the scarlet lobelia, plunged again into the thick of the woods. There was still no trace of the cows, but a

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part of the rough slash fence, which marked this portion of the boundary between our farm and the Carmichael's, was broken down, and I judged that, possibly, the cattle had gone through, and were somewhere in the Carmichael woods. After a little hesitation I decided to follow them.

For a little way the cow-path, which I presently came upon, and which led upward from the watering place, was pressed closely on either hand by a dense mass of undergrowth, maple and beech saplings, pin-cherry trees and raspberry bushes; but, as the older woods beyond were reached, these thickets gave way, and again I could see vast, dimly lighted spaces all interspersed with gray trunks and roofed in by the thick, green leafage above. Here, however, where the way was not so familiar to me, the vastness of the forest became a thing to be felt, and I began to be oppressed by a vague dread of I knew not what. Jap, too, seemingly less sure of his bearings, gave up his racing about, and trotted along nearer to me, ever and anon thrusting his damp, friendly nose into



"I began to be oppressed by a vague dread of I knew not what"



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the palm of my hand. But his presence reassured me, and so I did not once think of turning back. There was an old clearing just beyond where, possibly, I might find the cows.

At a few paces farther, and as an index to this clearing, the undergrowth again began to press upon either hand, so closely that it formed here a mass impenetrable to the eye, with branches sometimes stretching across the path, so that it was necessary to raise them in forcing one's way. The path, too, still went upward in a succession of knolls, and glancing up from the foot of one of them I saw a sight that made my heart stand still.

It was only Henry Carmichael, looking down at me. He was standing quite still, with the thick, green leafage on either side, and behind him; and in his arms he held a lamb which began to bleat pitifully, as though in pain, a late lamb, already grown almost into a sheep, but, on his broad bosom looking quite young and helpless; yet, for the instant, while knowing that it was Carmichael, I did not realise that it was he.

I think, however, that it must have been, most of all, the expression on his face which fascinated me, and brought up from the past, as a sort of vision, that memory from my baby years. . . . In later life, thinking of it, I knew that pity for the lamb with its broken leg, and wonder at the wild little apparition I must have been, with my black hair streaming over my shoulders, my startled eyes, and my scarlet lobélias held to my breast, had combined to form that tender, pitying, wondering expression—for, when I knew him better I knew that, unless when under leash, Henry Carmichael's heart lay on his countenance as the print on an open book—but, however that may be, at the time it was not only Carmichael with his bleating lamb and the greenery pressing all about him that I saw.

Years before, when but a very little child, I had seen when with my mother in some city church somewhere, a picture which had fascinated me, and which I had watched and watched all the time of the service, with the drone of the white-gowned clergyman growing fainter and

fainter in my ears. It was in a window of stained glass, and the morning sun, shining through it, had touched into what seemed a strange glory to my childish eyes the figure of the good Shepherd, with a little lamb in His arms, and the sheep following Him down a path that ran, with green bushes pressing on either hand, through a green, green meadow. Above all was the glory centred in the face, with the golden halo shining above it, and I had gazed and gazed until the sweet lips seemed to smile, and the gentle eyes to look down in pitying tenderness just on me.

So to-day the sudden appearance of Henry Carmichael startled me, as though the glowing apparition of my early childhood had projected itself, by some miracle, into the path in Carmichael's wood.

The next instant a sort of horror seized me, child though I was, that I should have confused Henry Carmichael, that man of wicked words, with such a memory; and with the sudden reaction all my old terrors of him came back. Before he could move or speak, for with such lightning-like rapidity occur the

transitions of the mind, I had darted like a startled fawn into the underbrush, and was flying on and on through the woods.

"Peggie! Peg Mallory!" I heard him calling, but instead of answering I threw myself down in a dense copse where the green light could scarce suffice to reveal my slight little shivering form or the scarlet blossoms heaving up and down as I pressed them to my bosom. Jap, who had followed me in great glee, and had been nosing around in the copse, evidently under the impression that nothing less exciting than the finding of a fox's or groundhog's hole could be at the bottom of such precipitancy, came up to me, disappointed, but with ears raised in expectancy. I was afraid he would yelp and divulge my whereabouts, for, having run away, I now felt all the trepidation of a fugitive; but when I raised my hand he came close to me to be petted, licking my face at every opportunity. Afterward he snuggled close to me, and so we lay, looking out into the woods which now seemed to be darkening strangely. Rapidly, in the distance, the myriad tree-trunks seemed

to be dissolving, or rather moving nearer to one-another and merging in an indistinguishable mass. At the same time the noise of waving tree-tops, which had kept up all the way like the murmur of a distant rapid, suddenly ceased, and all the forest seemed to be waiting in expectancy, while the darkness settled down like some vast pall falling silently from the heavens.

More terrified than ever, I darted out of the copse, and at the same time a low mutter of thunder and a sudden suffusion of red light through all the leaves heralded the beginning of a storm.

Glad, now, of the proximity of a human being, I lost my fear of Henry Carmichael in my greater fear of the storm, and darted with unerring step, like any wild thing of the woods, after him.

I came upon him in the open, just beyond the brook, when the flashes were beginning to come fast, and the thunder to roll louder and louder like the roar of approaching artillery. He heard the patter of my feet behind him, and half turned.

"Come on, come on!" he said, "Scared o' the storm? Here, hang on to my coat-tail. This great sheep takes up both o' my hands."

I did not like to take hold of his coat, but was glad to run along beside him through the fields, even though he did not speak, nor even look at me again all the way.

The rain did not begin to patter until we had reached the lower barn, where Dick was fastening in a flock of turkeys.

"Run across to Mallory's, Dick," said Mr. Carmichael, "'n' tell them Peggie's here, 'n' 'll be home all safe when the storm's over."

Immediately Dick set off on a run, while I followed his father into the sheep-house, and watched him while he set the lamb's leg between two bits of wood and bound it about with strips torn from his handkerchief. I thought he must be hurting the poor thing dreadfully, for it struggled a little, and bleated pitifully; but I knew he did not mean to, for all the while he kept talking to it, calling it "poor lambie!" and "poor little chap!" and assuring it it would be all right soon.

While watching the operation I was too

much interested to pay much attention to the storm; but once it was over, and the lambie laid down on a bundle of clean straw, I felt very nervous and wretched indeed, and cowered back as far as I could from the open door.

When I looked at him again, Carmichael was sitting on the straw watching me with that twinkle in his eyes which, I was beginning to notice, appeared there whenever he spoke to a child.

"Ye may come over here beside me if ye like," he said, and glad enough for the privilege, I went and sat down quite close to him.

In a moment or so he put his arm around me, looking down into my face.

"So ye're scared o' storms, little Gipsy," he said.

I answered him nothing, but, a louder crash sounding, hid my face against his shoulder.

For an instant his arm tightened about me, then he lifted me on to his knee and drew my face close to his neck, smoothing my hair with his great hand, and calling me, in a

voice little more than a murmur his "poor little girl."

Very strange it seemed to be lying thus in Henry Carmichael's arms, and yet, never had I felt so sweet a sense of protection. The lightning might flash and the thunder roll if it would; I felt very safe, and quite happy, and presently I was able to look out through the open door and watch the fields lit up by the great flash-lights, and anon, drenched by the big drops which were now falling in a heavy shower and pattering with a great noise on the roof. What a soothing power there was in the rain! The lightning seemed like the flash of an enemy's sword, and the thunder like the roar of a beast of prey; but the rain, which always seemed to break the force of the storm, was like a good friend who came to tell one that all was well. And what music there was in its pattering on the roof of the shed! Music different, yet akin to the gurgle of streams, the rustling of grass, the murmur of pine trees, and all the soft wild sounds one might love.

So satisfied did I become in listening to it,

indeed, that presently I looked up into Henry Carmichael's face and smiled.

"That's more like the thing," he said, giving me a little hug. Then, with a sly smile, "D'ye hate me yet?"

"No," I said, and snuggled my face against him.

He said nothing more, but sat looking out of the door until the rain had ceased somewhat. Then he got up, still keeping me in his arms.

"I'll carry ye to the house," said he, "so ye'll not get yer feet wet."

I had never been in Carmichael's house before, but it seemed very pleasant. There was a bright fire in the stove, "boiling the kettle" for supper; and there were flowers in the window; and Dick's fat white cat was curled up very comfortably on a little work table beside which Mrs. Carmichael sat darning stockings.

"Dear heart, Hal," Mrs. Carmichael said to her husband, "where did you find the little waif?"

And then she held up her face to him to be

kissed, and had to hear all about his finding me in the wood. After that, Minnie, the buxom servant girl, had to see that my feet were dry, and give me a cookie to eat, as I sat beside the stove, with Jap panting nervously beside my chair, evidently feeling much out of place and uncertain how to act.

I did not eat the cookie, but kept it in my hand, feeling rather foolish that such a great girl as I should be made such a baby of. But then, I reflected, Mrs. Carmichael wasn't used to little girls, and probably did not understand how to use them. . . . And besides, how could she possibly know that I was studying hygiene and grammar, and had got as far as Asia in the geography? At all events she was very kind, and, notwithstanding her lameness looked very happy and very sweet as she sat there beside her husband, smiling at him and then at me as she talked in her clear even voice, and with a nicety of language not common to our women, with the exception of Miss Tring and the minister's wife.

Upon the whole I was rather sorry when,

presently, Dick and Chris came in laden with rubbers and coat and umbrella for me, and I found that I must go home.

Shortly after arriving there my father came in, dripping wet from searching the woods for me. He had found the cows, but, in his anxiety, had left them there.

I was afraid he would not be pleased with me in consequence of my trip to Carmichael's, but he said not a word about it, and, emboldened, I ventured to say that Mr. Carmichael had been "real kind" to me.

My father put his hand very gently on my head.

"It was all right this time," he said, "but remember I don't want ye to go near Carmichael's again."

And then, without a word, he set off again, all dripping wet as he was, to bring the cows.

That night I thought more than ever about Henry Carmichael. Surely my father must be mistaken about him. Surely a man who could be so gentle to sheep, and who had spoken in such low tender tones to me, and had been so kind to Yorkie Dodd could not

be all bad! Chris, too, had said that he was a "good sort," and had not Chris as good a chance of judging as my father? Of course the mystery of the stolen timber was not yet cleared up, but then, might there not be some other explanation of it, as when we blamed Choddy Torrance for hooking Teddy Hall's pencil with a rubber on, and afterward found out that little Jack Skinner, whom nobody would have accused of such a thing, had taken it.

At all events, Mr. Carmichael had been very kind to me, and I now knew that he would never hurt my father, and I would not be afraid of him again, never, never.

My father, too, had ordered me, without explanation, not to go to Carmichael's again. There seems to be a contrary cord in human nature which draws strongly toward that which is forbidden, and I was full enough of human nature. I would not go to Carmichael's, but—not seeing the act in the will—I would have as charitable thoughts of Henry Carmichael as I chose—and I would make it all up by playing with Dick, yes, just more than ever.

CHAPTER VII

THE GETTING EVEN

IS THERE a more discouraging thing in the world than disillusionment, or a more confidence-shaking moment than that in which a halo with which we have invested our idol drops off, and the rosy mist we have enshrined it with falls away with a brutal suddenness, leaving, perhaps, a skeleton where we had imagined a god? Be the idol a thing abstract or concrete, a hope or a friend, the effect is the same. With the first shock of the reaction we feel that the world has become unsettled, and wonder in what or in whom we can, with surety, place our trust. Afterward, and sooner or later, according to our charity and openness of heart, things, as a rule, adjust themselves, and we become rational again.

It will be seen that Henry Carmichael was by no means an idol to me, the child who

watched him with such varying emotions—for children have their emotions, and even to a greater intensity than older folk: it is only when we have had more experience of the world than a child has had that there is a possibility of our becoming callous, transformed to such unyielding stuff that we "do not care." Yet, when the disillusionment of my newly-formed estimate of Henry Carmichael came, I was by no means insensitive to the sense of shock of which I have spoken.

How well I remember every event of the day that preceded that night. It was Sunday, a beautiful warm October day, with the maples flaming in red, and the beeches in yellow, wherever one might look.

I am sure my father enjoyed the quiet beauty of it all, for before breakfast he took me for a little walk up the road, and again and again he stopped to look into the depths of the glowing copses, or at the dull gold of the shorn fields, with a sort of quiet content. Once he said, as though speaking to himself, for he talked little to me:





"Yes, yes, God is very good to us—better than we deserve."

I remember, too, just how he looked when he took down the big black Bible after breakfast and began to read.

The reading that morning was the Twenty-third Psalm, that poem of poems, which has been to the hearts of the faint and the faithful in all generations like dew to the thirsty grass.

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, he leadeth me beside the still waters.

"He restoreth my soul; he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

"Thou preparest a table before me, in the presence of mine enemies; thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

My father read well, and his full, mellow voice, following the thought and emotion of the passage with a rare feeling and appreciation, left no cadence unturned which could bring out its strength or tenderness.

This morning, after he had finished reading the psalm, Miss Tring began to sing it, in a sweet, low voice, following the old metrical version, and presently we all joined her, even to old Chris who sat with bowed head.

"The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want,
He makes me down to lie
In pastures green, He leadeth me
The quiet waters by."

After that we knelt beside our chairs as usual, while my father prayed; but his prayer was not as usual. Even I noted the difference, for this morning he "forgot," as I imagined, to offer "thanks" that "while some were called upon to mourn and others deprived of the necessaries of life we were enjoying a portion of health and strength," and "basking in His favour." He also "forgot" to petition that we might be led "so to live on this fleeting and transitory earth as to be worthy of the reward in heaven which, in the justice of the Almighty awaited all who served Him in spirit and in truth."

Instead he prayed in a simple way thanking God for the beautiful day and the bounti-

ful harvest, and beseeching that we might have the grace to live sweet and honourable lives, walking in the footsteps of "Him, our example," who was so willing to carry us in His bosom, and comfort us with His love.

Perhaps my recent encounter with Carmichael in the wood, and the curious way in which it had recalled the great, glittering window, served to impress this prayer on me. However that may be, I listened to it throughout instead of, as usual, watching Jap through the "rungs" of the chair, or, with my face plunged reverentially in my hands, thinking of something else, while the words sounded far away, and came to me as sounds without meaning.



After that we got ready for church, and my father put his "tenth" apportionment into his envelope as he always did on Sunday mornings. The drive through the glowing woods in the democrat, my mother and father and I in the front seat, Miss Tring and old Chris with his big, green umbrella in the back; the mellow ringing of the church bells over the tree-tops; the faded asters and golden

rod and boneset in the swamp; the people pouring into the stiff, old-fashioned pews—ah, I have but to close my eyes to see it all again!

And it is but a step further to remember how, in the afternoon, we all—at least my father and mother, and Miss Tring and I, for old Chris had set out immediately after dinner for a three or four days' visit with his nephew—sat out under the trees in the garden, my father reading from his Christian Guide; Miss Tring swinging to and fro in a rocker and looking, for the most part, with a far-off gaze to the distant wood; while my mother dozed in her hammock, raising her plump hand, from time to time, to brush away an audacious fly that kept settling on her nose. As for me, I was much put to it to keep my attention on my catechism, although I tried hard in order that at the preacher's next visit I might retrieve the disgrace I had brought upon us all at his last one, when, in order to be put through my facings in this same catechism, I had been ignominiously drawn out from under a bed whence I had fled for escape.

So the day passed, and night fell.

* * * * *

I was awakened at about one o'clock by a loud crash; and now, if you grow weary of all these storms, I beg you to remember that it is almost impossible to tell of that summer without mentioning them, for indeed, there was scarcely a week in which we missed them, and they kept me sorely in dread.

My first thought was to close my window, for the wind was shrieking through it and the rain driving in. It had turned very cold, and the drip from the roof and trees betokened that it had been raining for some time. Hastily I drew the sash down, and in the nick of time, for a blinding glare and a second crash sent me helter-skelter into bed again, where I drew the clothes over my head and cowered in fear. It seemed as if all the witches and hobgoblins of the heavens had been let loose. Around the eaves the wind whistled with a thin, eerie screech; at the windows the panes rattled as though something were trying to get in; outside the trees creaked as they bent before the hurricane;



and all the while the rain beat on the roof and against the windows, with, occasionally, a sharp pattering accompaniment that betokened the presence of hail.

Presently the rain ceased. Then, again came a flash, and simultaneously a rushing roar that seemed to be hovering about our very house. I could bear it alone no longer, so gathering courage, only for want of which I had been prevented from fleeing before, I dashed out of my room and along the narrow corridor leading to my mother's.

When half-way through it, and directly opposite the window, a hesitating, quivering glimmer of lightning illuminated the scene out of doors. It lasted for two seconds perhaps, but in it, in the tree-bordered lane leading from our barn to the fields, I distinctly saw the huge form of Henry Carmichael going toward his home.

At the next flash, which came almost instantaneously, I saw my father coming toward me, his face, in the glare, seeming very pale; and, as a third terrific crash sounded over our heads I flew into his arms.

He carried me into the room and placed me

beside my mother, then, without a word went out and down stairs.

My mother was awake.

"Dear, dear!" she said sleepily, "where's your father off to now? Why can't he stay in his bed?"

A moment later she raised her head, for a strange, continuous, flickering light, not like that of the lightning, was creeping up the bed-room wall.

"Gracious sakes' alive:" she said, "what's that?" and sprang out of bed.

Against the window I saw her white-robed form, with the shadow of it black upon the strange, red light.



"Mercy upon us! The barn's afire!" she screamed with the next breath; then I was at her side.

In truth the barn was afire, the flames already bursting forth, in a momentary cessation of rain, from the roof, while dense clouds of smoke, all red from the glow beneath, curled up to the inky sky.

A moment later and we were running, both of us, toward it, our bare feet splashing

through the cold puddles that lay shining with the reflection along the path.

We found my father frantically dragging at some piece of machinery that had been run in on the barn floor.

"Call Torrance and Might!" he shouted; but ere we had well turned to obey his behest we came face to face with Carmichael and Dick.

One wrench of Carmichael's mighty arm and the big machine, whatever it was, rolled forth on its wheels and down into the yard.

"Go for Might!" shouted Carmichael, and Dick set off on a run.

Then an awful thing happened.

Striding up before Henry Carmichael my father looked him fair in the face with an expression upon his that made us fear for what was to come. Slowly he raised his hand as if in accusation, but the words failed him. Instantly the hand dropped and he clutched at his throat, the white of his face turning, in the red light, to purple. An instant later his features worked convulsively, then he fell heavily forward on Carmichael, who reached both arms to receive him.

With a low cry my mother rushed forward; then, collecting herself marvellously, she said, "To the house!" and set off, while Carmichael followed, carrying my father as though he had been a child.

Oh what a sight that was, our little procession moving along with that terrible burden, with the fire-brands flying above our heads, and the red light mounting up behind, and the lightning quivering everywhere, with intervals of double darkness between! And the worst was not yet.

"Merciful Heaven! The house is afire too!"

It was Carmichael's voice, and looking up between my terrified sobs I saw that what he said was only too true. Ignited somehow by a straying brand, the fire was already well under way, and the smoke and flames were bursting through the kitchen roof. The higher front part of the house was still intact, with the reflection of the fire shining red upon all its windows facing the barn.

My mother gave a smothered cry, "Miss Tring!" and dashed in through the front door

whence she returned in a moment with the little teacher who, as it afterward appeared, had been sleeping quietly through all the turmoil.

Carmichael had laid my father on the grass, and was kneeling beside him with a hand on his heart.

"I'll carry him to our house," he said to my mother. "He must be got in out of here!"

But my mother turned on him with a sort of savagery, my placid gentle mother in whose eyes there had seldom been any look more angry than that of a playing kitten. Yet there she stood, erect as an avenging goddess, with the flickering glare of the fire light on her white, terrible face, and the burning of a bitter resentment in her eyes.

"Henry Carmichael," she said, and the tone of her voice was enough to make one shudder, so full of determined agony was it, "Robert Mallory will never enter your door, dead or alive!"

"But, Heavens above, woman, he can't lie out here!"

She raised her hands to her head as though

dazed, then took them down and spoke again in those harsh, unnatural tones which, surely, were not my mother's.

"He will rest in the apple-house till Adam Might comes," she said.

But she made no objection to Carmichael's carrying my father, and so once more he raised him and carried him to the little out-house where my mother, now sobbing wildly, threw herself on the floor beside him shrieking, "Robert! Robert! Speak to me! Speak to your own little Alice! Robert! Robert!" like one demented.

Scarcely had he been laid on the floor when Miss Tring came in with a lighted lamp, and set it down on a board over an apple-bin. Then away she went again only to return with a pillow and blankets.

"Is Dick back?" asked Carmichael.

"I have sent him for the doctor," said Miss Tring.

"Thank Heaven! How did he go?"

"On horseback. He'll be back soon."

With that Carmichael and Miss Tring set to work rubbing and chafing my poor father,

and were hard at it when Mr. and Mrs. Might appeared at the door.

"You can do nothing here," said Carmichael. "The doctor has been sent for. See to the house!"

At once they went out, and I, unable to bear the terrible scene longer, ran after them. At a few paces from the apple-house door I crouched down in a little forlorn bundle on the wet grass, and gave myself up to uncontrollable weeping. It seemed as though I were passing through some terrible nightmare wherein nothing was real, and yet I remember how, as the howling wind veered, there came upon me now the cold wet blasts of the night, and now belches of heat from the burning house.

The first grain of comfort came to me when a cold nose was thrust between my hands, and a warm tongue began licking my face.

"Jap! Jap!" I said, "Oh, Jap!" and throwing both my arms about the dog I strained him to me. He was warm and loving, and helped to soothe me so that I could look about. I could not see the burning barn, but only

the dull red glare from it which was growing dimmer as the frame work burned down. At the house the fire had now spread to the front, although Mr. and Mrs. Might were still running in and out, carrying whatever they could lay hands on, and placing it in the garden. Above, the thunder clouds had passed, and the sky was covered with ragged, drifting masses of vapour that fled ever and ever to the eastward like driven, tortured spirits, just parting, here and there, to reveal glimpses of the far-off sky and the stars. Over the wet trees the red light flickered and wavered strangely, and in the garden, wherever a bush or a tree intervened, black shadows elongated themselves and withdrew again like moving, living things of darkness. It was a terrible sight, strange and weird, but not so terrible to me, not so weird as was that pale, steady light shining from the door of the little apple-house where I knew not what dreadful thing was happening.

I could not go near it. Perhaps my father was dying, dead—and death was an awful thing to me. And so I crouched there,

shivering from head to foot, and icy cold, until there was a rattle of wheels in the lane, which told of the doctor's arrival.

With the first rattle—perhaps it was the association of ideas with the lane which thrust it upon me—a terrible thought came to me.

Again I saw in the lightning flash, Carmichael's huge form making its way homeward. And now my brain began to work feverishly, darting from scene to scene, and bringing each before me like moving picures in a panorama; my father hastening through the hall with its east window at the very time in which I had seen Carmichael; my father's terrible look of accusation at the very moment on which he fell; Carmichael's great fist uplifted toward my father at Jamieson's raising, and his threat, "I'll be even with you yet, Mallory!"

Clearly, pointedly the whole sequence mapped itself out before me, for, child though I was, this terrible night seemed to have aged me by years, and I sat very erect, forgetting to respond to Jap's caresses, lost in a judgment which threw my childhood years far, far be-

hind me. Yes, without doubt my father blamed Carmichael for setting the barn afire. Carmichael must have done it, else why had he been there in the middle of the night? And Carmichael had, perhaps, *killed my father!*

Lost in the horror of it all, I scarcely realised when Dick came, or when he put his coat about me, telling me that I was nearly frozen.

But I looked at him and said solemnly, "Dick, your father set our barn on fire!"

"My father!" gasped Dick, "He never did! Shame on you, Peg Mallory! "

"But I saw him going away from the barn, 'n' father saw him too! He said he'd get even with father! You heard him yourself!"

"Well! I guess he wouldn't sneak around this way to do it!" said Dick in burning indignation; but whatever else he might have said was checked by Mr. Might's calling to him to help out with something.

After that I remember little definitely. I seemed to be not myself, nor the world the world I had known, as I sat there, vaguely

conscious that the doctor had gone again, his buggy wheels rattling down the lane, and that Mr. and Mrs. Might and Dick had ceased from their labours and gone into the apple-house.

Mr. Might came quickly out again and set off toward home, and then Miss Tring came to me.

"Come, dear, we are to go to Mrs. Might's" she said.

Shivering from head to foot I got up, and let her put some clothes on me, then I followed her past our dear old home, now but a mass of glowing coals with but part of the walls erect, and the chimneys standing up like monuments, and down the little garden where the late hydrangea was still in bloom and the wet dripping from the trees like tears. After that, sadly and silently along the dark, muddy road, with the wind sweeping over it as though it had been November.

"Where is my mother?" I asked.

"She will come with Mrs. Might, dear," and Miss Tring squeezed my hand until it pained.

On the way we met Mr. Might coming back with his democrat.

"Is father—dead?" I asked of Miss Tring.

"He is sleeping very peacefully."

"You mean he is *dead!*" I said, fiercely; and for answer Miss Tring stooped down, took me in her arms, and kissed me on the lips.

I did not see my father when he came to Might's that night, for Miss Tring had hurried me into a bed with soft, woolly blankets, but I heard the democrat driven slowly up to the door, and the sound of feet carrying a heavy burden. Then, after a long time, my mother and Mrs. Might came into my room, Mrs. Might carrying a lamp. One would scarcely have known either of them, neither Mrs. Might in her dishevelled dress, with her thin hair, minus its usual "switch," all blown in wisps across her forehead, nor yet my mother with her pale face and her eyes with the wild, frightened look in them, like those of a hunted doe. But from Mrs. Might the primness was all gone, and she was very motherly as she kissed me, and tucked the blankets better about me merely for the

sake of doing something. As for my mother, she suffered herself to be put to bed like a little child, and then she lay until morning with wide-open eyes, and her arms wound tightly about me as though she were afraid of losing me with the rest.

I do not know clearly why it was that I did not tell my mother nor anyone, neither that night nor at any other time, of my having seen Carmichael that night in the lane. I think I was afraid of some dreadful trouble coming on Dick if I did, that his father, perhaps, might be hanged, and that his mother might die of the shock of it. However that may be, I kept my secret, though it trembled on my tongue many and many a time in the days that followed, and, at times, came to haunt me as a nightmare. But I found an outlet to the strain of it in hating Henry Carmichael with all my heart. After all my father had been right, and I had been very wrong in ever thinking well of this dreadful man.

But to go back. Toward morning I fell asleep, and when I awoke my mother was still lying by me staring up at the ceiling.

Presently Mrs. Might came in with a cup of tea, which my mother scarcely tasted.

"It's well the stock was nearly all out o' the barn," she said, with a hopeless attempt at comforting my mother, "'n' Adam's jist been over to git the things we carried out. There's a fine lot, beddin' 'n' sich, 'n' yer sewin' machine, 'n' chairs, 'n' yer parlour lamp with the dangles on. I carried that out with my own hands, 'n' not one o' the danglin' things is broke."



But my mother only lay back again, and resumed her unseeing stare at the ceiling. By and by, however, when I got up and began moving around the room, she became more like herself, and permitted us to dress her in one of Mrs. Might's gowns, for her own had all been burned; and then she went downstairs and into the room where my father lay.

Oh, it was a weary sight to see her there, she, who had sobbed her heart out over Sandy Dodd, shedding never a tear over the one whom she had worshipped, but just sitting there, with that awful look in her eyes, rocking all the time, and looking up with

a perplexed smile that died on her lips before it was well formed, when anyone spoke to her.

When old Chris came the women hoped she would cry, but she did not, even when he stood at the head of the coffin shaking his old head, and talking to himself in his real sorrow.

"It's a grand man ye were, Robert Mallory, though there was them that misjudged ye. An honest man ye were, 'n' just. Aye, it was justice were the prop o' yer life, 'n' if anyone ever called ye hard it was jist because ye wanted others to be as just to you as you were to them. Ye never wronged anybody, no not be the half of a farthin', 'n' ye couldn't stand meanness 'n' trickery. 'N' ye were a good friend to me, 'n' to the poor, 'n' to them that was in any kind o' need. 'N' the good Lord 'll not forgit it to ye now, that He won't!"

But when Henry Carmichael came in, my mother became a different woman. In some way she seemed to hold him responsible for my father's death, though the doctor had pronounced it due to heart-disease aggravated by unusual exertion at the time of the

fire; and as soon as she saw him her face hardened, and the terrified, child-like look all left to make room for one of defiance and hate.

Getting up from her chair, and standing there very erectly, she said to him:

"Don't ye come in here, Henry Carmichael! You who was an enemy to my man since ever he knew ye, even to his dyin' breath! We're beholdin' to ye fer carryin' him in last night, though it's a sore sorrow to me that 'twas your arms were the last to be around him after what the sight o' ye done. But mark ye this, Henry Carmichael—from this day see that ye keep away from me and mine."

And without a word Henry Carmichael left the room.

CHAPTER VIII

A NEW LIFE

THE days that followed were filled with a strange sort of life for us. Everyone vied in kindness toward us, and presents of all sorts poured in upon us, bedding and cheeses, and cans of fruit, and clothing. Even Gay Torrance's second best, ribbons and all, was not too good to be dyed black and sent to me all pressed and ready for wearing, with a little black hat, and shoes and stockings, all complete.

For a time we still stayed on at Mrs. Might's, but every day my mother would insist on going back to our ruined home. There she would sit, with that helpless, dazed look, in the hammock that still swung, idly enough, beneath the trees, looking round upon the desolation of it all, the gaping cellar full of ashes and cinders, the gaunt, smoked chimneys, and the scorched, shrivelled leaves of



" Farther down in the garden the bushes were yet all green "



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the trees nearest where the house had been. Farther down in the garden the bushes were yet all green, and clumps of late phlox and fall sunflower still showed an odd glint of colour; but this touch of the old home only seemed to make the desolation more complete.

Once, just once, she went to the apple-house door and looked in, but turned away with a shudder, and put her hands over her face.

So the days went by idle-handed for her, in a sort of living death.

As usual it was Amanda Might who came to the rescue.

"Adam Might 'n' me 's jist been thinkin'," I overheard her say to Miss Tring one day, "that Mrs. Mallory 'll never be herself again till she 's somethin' of her own to clean, 'n' fuss over, 'n' somethin' to save."

"I 've been thinking that too," said Miss Tring, "something will have to be done; but what? That 's what I've been puzzling over."

"Isn't the remains o' that old log shanty back in the clearin' yet?" asked Amanda.

"Why, yes, but"—in a tone of discour-

agement—"there 's no flooring in it, nor doors nor windows; and the cattle have been running through it. It's nothing but an old ruin!"

"All the same," said Amanda, with decision, "it's a good size, with a loft, 'n' if the logs is standin' up all ready, why, with a good big bee the men could soon fix it up. I 'll do the cookin' fer them."

"But,"—Miss Tring still hesitated—"it's such a lonely place!"

Mrs. Might said nothing for a moment, but when she spoke again it was with her usual confidence.

"She'll be more contented there," she said, "than where it all happened. The only thing's how to mention it. If *I* did she might think I was tryin' to get her out o' my house, which the Lord knows"—with all reverence—"I 'm not. 'T was never the way o' the Greens to grudge anything to them that was in trouble 'n' it 's not goin' to be the way o' the Mights. Only—somethin' 's got to be done fer Alice Mallory or she's goin' crazy, sure 's as my name 's Amanda Might!"

Miss Tring considered.

"I'll talk to her about it," she said presently. "I understand how you feel about it, Mrs. Might."

The way my mother brightened up when the proposition was made to her, very delicately indeed, astonished us all. There was now something to see to, something to plan about, and she threw herself into the preparations with a feverishness that showed how strongly the reaction was working in her, and even caused Miss Tring and Mrs. Might some uneasiness.

"There's some money in the bank in Saintsbury," she said, "'n' some more that was owin' us beside, 'n' we'll jist draw out what'll be needed fer the lumber 'n' stuff."

This arrangement was agreed to, but, had my mother been more of a woman of the world, she might have known how suspiciously small the bill was. However, her sense of independence was preserved, and when she moved into the "new" old house it was with the feeling that it was all her own, although she was much put about that the

men who had come to the bee would accept no wages for their work.

"Ye know we've nobody to send back but Chris, now," she said, "'n' he isn't as young as he used to be. But I thank ye all kindly. Ye've been very good to Peggie 'n' me."

Very strange it seemed in the little log house, and to me, for a long time, very little like home. There was just one large room downstairs, but upstairs there were bedrooms enough for us all, even though the beds had to be slipped very close under the slant of the roof, and it was necessary to keep as nearly as possible under the ridge in order to walk upright. But oh, how bare it all looked, notwithstanding the bits of furniture that crept in one by one, and the flowers that Miss Tring kept on the table, and the dainty muslin curtains that she hemmed with her own slender fingers and put up at the windows.

Very strange, too, it seemed, to go out about the door and see just the bare, weed-grown clearing with the forest all about it, instead of our snug garden with its gravelled walks and picket fence; and when the first





snows came it looked bleaker still. That day, coming home from school with Miss Tring through the thistles and dried, fuzzy goldenrods, and mulleins all ragged with snow, I said, thinking of the terrible time we had passed through, and all that we had lost, "Oh, Miss Tring, do you think God is all kind?"

"'And it shall come to pass that at the eventide it shall be light,'" she quoted softly, then added, squeezing my hand gently, "it is hard, so hard to understand things, girlie, and you have begun to wonder early—but I am very sure that everything will be clear some day, and that we will then see that everything has been for the best. . . . If we didn't feel this," she added, suddenly and impetuously, "I don't see how some of us could live! . . But"—passing again to her sweet, even tones—"oh yes, be very sure that God is good. After all, there has been much sunshine in your life and in your mother's, and there will be again, never fear. You have still something to be thankful for, girlie."

"Yes," I said, "people have been very kind," and I thought how our problem of housing the stock—a very very serious one for me in my love for the animals, cows, sheep, pigs, and all, and my fear lest they should suffer from hunger and cold—had been solved by our neighbours who had offered to take, one here and one there, all that we, or Chris, rather, had not been able to sell to advantage.

"Yes," she said, "very, very kind. There is much kindness in the world—when you get really down to the hearts of people."

That night she took me into her room, and talked to me long and earnestly, telling me that I must be cheerful and brave for my mother's sake, and that I must try ever to look at the bright side of things if I wanted to grow up to be a strong, useful girl. And when she went away for the night she left me a little book in which the words were marked:

> "Oh yet we trust that somehow good
> Will be the final goal of ill,
> To pangs of nature, sins of will,
> Defects of doubt, and taints of blood;

"That nothing walks with aimless feet;
That not one life shall be destroyed,
Or cast as rubbish to the void,
When God hath made the pile complete;

"That not a worm is cloven in vain;
That not a moth with vain desire,
Is shrivelled in the fruitless fire,
Or but subserves another's gain.

"Behold, we know not anything;
I can but trust that good shall fall
At last—far off—at last, to all,
And every winter change to spring."

Since those days the poem has become very dear to me.

So the winter fell, and the dismal Christmas and the New Year came and went; and so closed our Annus Mirabilis, our year of wonders; saddest, most eventful year of our lives.



CHAPTER IX

THE CLEARING

A LITTLE clearing, round as a wheel, with a little log house at one side of it, over which, in time, the bitter-sweet crept, and the wild clematis ran riot, and the Virginia creeper threw its leaves, red as coals in the autumn, about the doors and in at the windows.

Awakened in the morning by a chorus sung by a thousand birds, and getting up to see the gray dawn fleeing silently to the westward with one faint, coral cloud in its wake.

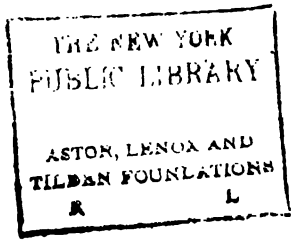
Leaning out of an upstairs window toward the great wood, so close, almost, that one could touch its branches, and peering down in the dark depths where the aisles were lost in shadow and the gray tree-trunks ranged, the pillars in a cathedral of God's own making.

Lying awake at night, listening to the mur-



"A little clearing, round as a wheel"




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mur of a million leaves, and watching the moving square of moonlight on the floor; or again, lying there close under the roof, upon which the rain pattered like the feet of a thousand fairies dancing.

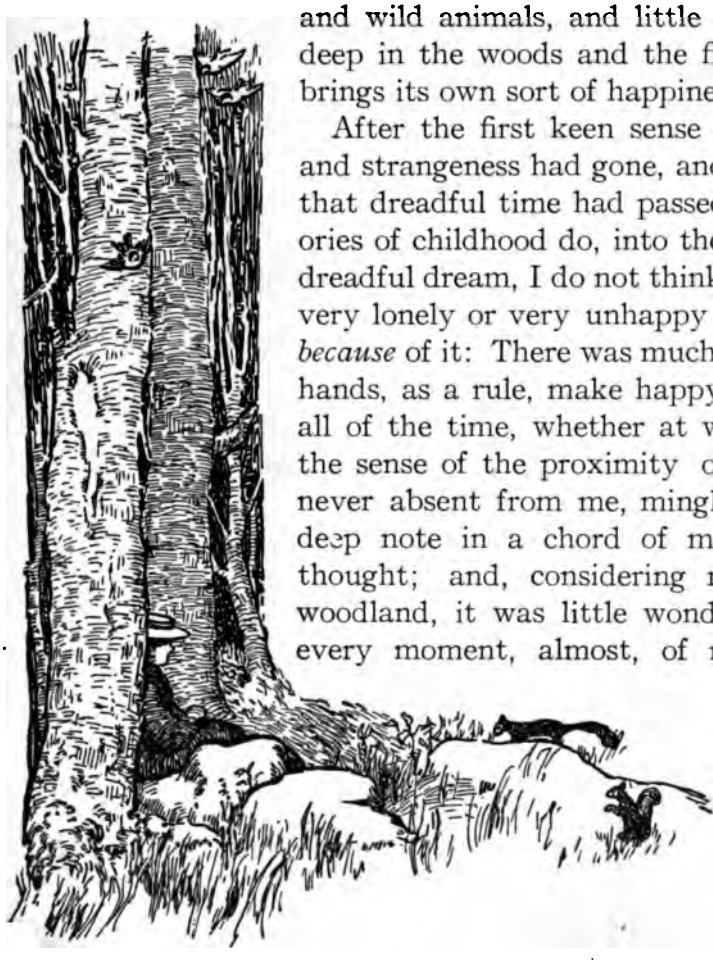
Sitting out at the edge of the wood, and looking across the little round clearing to the billowy tree-tops beyond until the harvest moon rose above them like a great golden lantern hung in the sky, and the shadows grew long and black below, with the moonlight lying between like a rime of hoar-frost on the ground, and the tall mulleins and bur-marigolds beside you mystically growing, in the curious, dream-like light, into small trees.

Listening, at such a time with your ears, and above all "with your soul," to all the noises of the night, the murmuring of the trees; the soft swishing of the corn leaves in the clearing; the chirp of the crickets at a little distance all about you; the distant, quavering whistle of a raccoon.

Have you known any of these pictures at first hand—*your* pictures, *your* experiences,

not mine? If so, you have known something of our life in the little clearing.

Mayhap you have thought life in such a spot indescribably lonely. Then you have missed something that I, many as were my limitations, possessed, that tang of wildness which belongs only to Indians, and poets, and wild animals, and little birds that build deep in the woods and the fields, and which brings its own sort of happiness.



After the first keen sense of homesickness and strangeness had gone, and the memory of that dreadful time had passed, as such memories of childhood do, into the semblance of a dreadful dream, I do not think that I was ever very lonely or very unhappy in the clearing, *because* of it: There was much to do, and busy hands, as a rule, make happy hearts. Then, all of the time, whether at work or at play, the sense of the proximity of the forest was never absent from me, mingling, like a rich, deep note in a chord of music, in all my thought; and, considering my love of the woodland, it was little wonder that I spent every moment, almost, of my spare time,

within its border, until it came to seem like a great, sheltering mother, within whose arms I was safe, and at home.

Soon, too, I found that, if I sat very still, the little birds, and squirrels, and mice, and other soft, shy, woodsy things would come, in their curiosity, quite close to me, and even, in time, establish a sort of timid friendship, a shy, silent, undemonstrative friendship, it is true, and yet neither an unsatisfactory nor an uninteresting one; and even when a great girl I would go and watch for my little friends, finding that, if I were alone, I was seldom disappointed in seeing them, although, if even Miss Tring were present, they invariably failed to appear.

It was a marvel to me, too, how many things I saw which escaped Miss Tring, and how hard it was for me to get her to see exactly where they were—the tiny brown nest pasted against the bark of a tree; the little fungus, gleaming redhot from the root of a rotting stump; the small creeper flattening himself against a gnarled branch; or the head of a woodpecker peering around a bare snag to observe us.



But enough of this. Unless you have a bit of the wood's own spirit in you, you will not be interested.

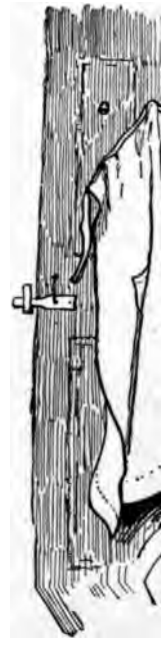
As I have said, there was plenty of work to be done at the clearing; and, for my mother's sake in especial, this was well. Under the necessity of "doing things to make money," and making shifts to save, her old energy came gradually back, and with it a shade of the pink to her cheeks, and a glimmer of the old peace to her eyes. As the time went on we would even hear her singing, sometimes in a sort of low crooning, as she made the butter into pats, or knitted the stockings which she meant to exchange at Saintsbury for sugar, and tea, and warm winter clothing for us all. At last, one day, the freshly ironed, white apron made its appearance behind the kitchen door, and Miss Tring and I looked at each other jubilantly.

"I really believe," said Miss Tring, "that your mother is quite herself again."

But from the time that my father died, one marked change had come over my mother. Before that time her attitude to the Carmi-

chaels had been a sort of indifference. My father might have his quarrels with Henry Carmichael if he chose, why should she trouble herself? From that fateful night, however, the sight of one of them, even of Dick, was enough to throw her into a wild state of nervous excitement.

"I'd like to find out about that timber," she said one day, "'n' do by it as yer father would ha' done"—poor little soul, the main care of her life now was to do as my father would have done—"but I couldn't hev' an investigation without comin' across the track o' them Carmichaels, 'n' I couldn't stand it, Peggie, I know I couldn't! I'd never come through it alive!" and the nervous flush of her cheek showed that the experiment might be a dangerous one. So the matter of the timber was let rest.



Once only did the field-sparrow trill which I recognised as Dick's come to the clearing. After that I was strictly forbidden to have anything to do with my old playmate. At first this restriction was a sore trial, but as the years went on, the memory of his comrade-



ship, like other memories drifted off among the dreams of the past, and Dick Carmichael gradually became, as I fancied, nothing at all to me. I saw him but very seldom after coming to the Clearing, and when we met it was only to speak and pass on.

As I grew into womanhood, and, at first, somewhat to my consternation, I found that the management of the farm was gradually devolving upon me. Chris, good faithful old Chris, was becoming "too much used up with the rheumatics," to be up with the sunrise, and to go about directing the labour of the hired help and seeing to their hiring as had been his wont; and, as his bodily powers declined, he seemed to lose confidence in his mental powers also, and began, at first, to refer every question, no matter how trifling, to my mother.

She, however, never accustomed to pronouncing upon momentous matters, and having developed all her business capacity in the line of small economies, was, upon each occasion, so genuinely distressed to know which course would be the better to follow,

and so fearful of taking a wrong one, that, from the very beginning, she called upon me to express my opinion in the matter, and with such ostensible relief that before long even I recognised that she had become only the figure-head of the little establishment, and I the acting manager.

Almost daily such little dialogues as the following occurred with unfailing regularity.

"Peggie, my dear, Chris wishes to know which it 'ud be best to hev'—oats or barley—put in the hill field."

"Which do you think, mother?"

"Gracious sakes' alive, how do I know! Yer father alwus attended to sich things, 'n' with all the work o' that big house to attend to how could I be botherin' my head. Dear, dear! To think I'd ever come to hev' to see about the like, 'n' maybe go wrong 'n' lose! Really, Peg, ye'll hev' to go over to Adam Might 'n' talk to *him* about it."

So I would set off and discuss the matter with Adam Might with all the gravity of an old farmer, and all the anxiety of a novice.

On my return I would, perhaps, say,

"Mother, Mr. Might thinks we should have a root-crop out in that field this year."

"Of course, of course," my mother would respond, with an air of recovering something that had slipped her memory. "How stupid of us, Peggie! I might ha' known that yer father 'd ha' put roots in turnips 'n' mangels, 'n'—'n'—potatoes."

In time it dawned upon me that books on agriculture might be of value, and so, upon the very first opportunity, I procured some at Saintsbury. After that I was never in want of occupation, and, much to my surprise, found out how very interesting chapters on tillage and drainage, corn-culture and rotation of crops may be, provided one's interest in such subjects is thoroughly aroused. Burroughs says you must have the bird in your heart before you can find him in the bush; and again, you must have the trout in your heart before you can get it on your hook. I am very sure that as soon as I got the farm in my heart I found the interest in it on my hook—aye and the profit too, for although we made some mistakes and were

compelled to move slowly, it was a proud day to me to find that some of my very own suggestions had proved "paying."

"I tell you what," Mrs. Might said one day, sitting up very erectly in her chair, and beaming upon me, while she tapped her smelling-salts bottle, "the way Peggie's handlin' things around here 's a credit to her. It was only last night I heard my man Adam say, 'Peg Mallory's goin' to make more money with her brains than half the men in the townships is with brains 'n' hands too.' *That 's* what he said, Mrs. Mallory, sure 's my name 's Amanda Might. I alwus knew what she'd come to, Mrs. Mallory"—shaking her forefinger impressively—"'n ye see I wasn't mistook."

My mother looked at her mystified.

"Oh yes," she said, "Peg's a great help to me. It 's a hard thing fer a woman to hev' a farm to manage when her husband 's gone, 'n' her help 's gettin' too old to be what he used to be. But Peg 's been a great help; I must say that."

And it was a great joy to me to hear my

mother say so, and to know that she appreciated my efforts.

For me, it is true, there was much worry in all this head farming and fussing with hired help; but it is to be much doubted if we ever do anything that is of much real value without finding some sort of hardship in it, and, after all, it is just such hardship that brings the keenest satisfaction. I should have liked to go on to school longer, and my having to give up so soon, especially when Gay Torrance went off to "Miss Vincent's School for Girls" in Saintsbury, and Hud Jamieson to study medicine, was, for a time, a source of keen disappointment. But there was no possibility of my having such opportunities, so I had to content myself with determining to read and study in the evenings, as Dick Carmichael, so I heard, was doing, with the assiduity characteristic of him.

As for Chris he seemed often filled with a sort of vague unrest which betrayed that, after all, his mental weakness was the result of bodily infirmity rather than of the approach of senility. Old age, as a rule, comes

on with a gentle gliding, like the waters of a great quiet river which pass imperceptibly out into the bosom of the calm, deep lake; and so we see contented old men and women, puttering about, busying themselves with small tasks, and cheating themselves with the sweet delusion that they are just as energetic and able to accomplish as ever they were.

But Chris sometimes sat moodily, without a word to say: or, if he spoke at all, in a tone of gentle complaint.

"Aye, Peggie," he said to me once, when I came in all aglow from a tramp over the farm, "ye're young 'n' strong, 'n' it's right fer ye to rejoice in yer strength. Aye, I've been through it"—dropping into that low tone of far-away reminiscence—"I've seen the rosy skies, 'n' the sunrises 'n' sunsets all light, 'n' the storms jist outcries o' strength, makin' ye exult in life 'n' the power to rise beyond them. But now I'm old, 'n' already the heavens is gray, 'n' the steady clouds lowerin,' 'n' jist a little streak o' light on the far sky-line to show that there's light, 'n'



youth, n' strength waitin' yet. It 'll be a glad endin', but the waitin' 's long."

"But Chris," I said, "you are not yourself now. You 'll be well again, and able to go about, and then you'll not find the time so wearisome."

"Aye," he said. "I'd like to be o' some real use again."

"You've done so much, Chris. You ought to be satisfied to take a bit of a rest."

"Aye," looking about the clearing, "I've turned the mulleins 'n' thistles to corn 'n' 'taties, 'n' the rest o' the farm didn't go back neither. But dash it, Peg"—with a spurt of the old spirit—"it's all the harder to sit here with one's foot in a sling!"

It was Miss Tring, however, who was my real stay and inspiration through all this time of stumbling and proving. She was one of those whose good acts it is not easy to tick off like beads in a rosary. So quiet and gentle was she that, indeed, it is hard to tell just how and wherein she influenced those about her; yet I do know that whenever she was near I was never wholly discouraged,

and that my best thoughts and firmest steps have almost invariably been due, directly or indirectly, in some way, to her. Her name was Violet, but often, I thought, it would have been more appropriately "Hope."



CHAPTER X

A PARING BEE

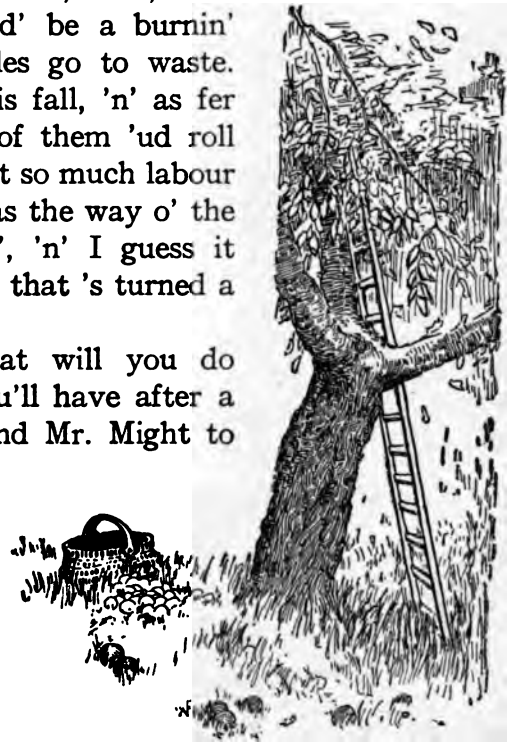
IT MAY seem somewhat far-fetched to say that the whole tenor of my life was changed by an unusually large apple crop which the Mights had in the fall of 18—, and yet, how can I help thinking so, when I know what followed, and that, by just such trifles, is often set free the lever which swings with mighty force in carrying out the thing we call destiny?

However that may be, in the fall which I have mentioned, the Might orchard showed a tremendous apple crop. I saw it at the height of the apple picking, when the maple woods all about were aflame with scarlet, and the yellow apple leaves, just beginning to drop in a thin golden rain, left all the more open to view the bending crop of brown russets, rich red Baldwins, and pippins round and full as the harvest moon.

Amanda Might was perched upon a ladder up among the branches, but she came down as soon as she saw me, untying the red kerchief from her head.

"D'ye know what I've been thinkin'?" she said, looking round upon the bountiful harvest concentrating into little heaps beneath the trees, "I've been thinkin' I'll jist hev' a parin' bee Hollow Eve [Hallowe'en] Night. It's an awful bother I know, hevin' people tapsalteerin' all over a body's [she pronounced it 'buddy's'] house; but, as I said to Adam Might, it 'ud' be a burnin' shame to let all them apples go to waste. There's no sale fer them this fall, 'n' as fer pittin' them, why the half of them 'ud roll out rotten in the spring. Jist so much labour lost, says I, 'n' it never was the way o' the Green's to work fer nothin', 'n' I guess it won't be the way of a Green that 's turned a Might."

"But," I hesitated, "what will you do with all the dried apples you'll have after a paring bee, and only you and Mr. Might to eat them?"



"There's good sale fer dried apples in the spring," she said, "now that dryin' apples has gone out o' fashion among the farmers, 'n' there 's not many o' them comin' in. And," —giving her head a toss—"it's beneath no one to turn an honest penny, *you* know that, Peggy, brought up as ye were with sich a savin' mother. O' course it 's not that I *hev*' to make by sellin' apples, or anything *else* fer that matter"—with conscious satisfaction —"but 'waste not want not' 's a good motto fer us all, 'n' was alwus the way o' the Greens."

After this peroration she sat down on a step of the ladder, and began to finger the apples in her basket in a half ashamed way, as though about to make a confession.

"Besides," she went on in a lower tone, and with that peculiar softness in her face which I had noted, most strongly perhaps, at the time of my father's death, and which after all gave a glimpse of the real goodness in Amanda Might's heart, "besides, me 'n' Adam Might's been talkin' things over lately, 'n' we've come to the conclusion that we've

lived too much to ourselves, 'n' never give others the little pleasures we had a right to give them. I s'pose it's the way folks gets into that hesn't neither chick nor child. They jist git into a sort o' rut, 'n' there they are joggin' along, their own two selves, 'n' not much use to themselves or anybody else. 'N' I jist said to Adam Might, 'I don't care if the house is all mussed up from cellar to garret, I'm goin' to hev' them young folks in, jist as if I'd had a daughter o' my own to hev' them in fer.' It 's queer the way things is divided up"—looking off wistfully toward the distant woods—"There's Mrs. Torrance with more 'n' she can handle, 'n' her house in a tother from one year's end to another. 'N' then there's me—well, my house is clean enough, it was alwus the way o' the Greens to be clean—but I wouldn't ha' minded hevin' it mussed up with jist one or two."

"So you thought you'd begin by making a paring-bee," I said, amused at my friend's expedient of giving the young folk an evening without going back on the principles of the Greens for savingness and lack of "tother."

"Oh yes," more briskly, "young folks hes fun at parin' bees, 'n' if they can hev' their fun 'n' be o' some use beside, I see no harm in it. Anyway, I jist thought I'd like to see them again bitin' at apples on strings, 'n' dodgin' after 'em in tubs o' water, 'n' throwin' a peelin' over their left shoulder the way we did the night Adam Might came home with me. That was jist two years before he married his first wife. I was jist twenty then."

"But if they go to all that play, what about the dried apples?"

"Oh," she said, "many hands makes light work, 'n' what 's left 'll jist keep me busy fer the rest o' the fall."

So the invitations were issued which electrified us, and although some of the young folk were dubious about the "sort of time" we should have at Might's, and expressed an opinion that we'd have to "pitch into the apples" all evening, I, who had had the opportunity to penetrate Mrs. Might's little ruse, had some idea of the work that would be expected of us.

On one point, however, all were at one.

that we should have a "supper" the like of which had not been known about Oroway Centre, for Mrs. Might's culinary skill was as well known as her faculty for never doing things by halves.

On the night before, Gay Torrance and Hud Jamieson arrived home from Saintsbury, not loath to seize the opportunity of a holiday and a party combined.

Calling in the morning at Torrance's, Miss Tring and I found the house in unusual turmoil with the centre of the swirl in the parlour, which had always been the one spot in the Torrance household sacred to peace and order, a sort of holy of holies to be entered but on rare occasions. This parlour, from the once or twice upon which I had been permitted to cross its threshold, was marked in my memory chiefly by reason of the bunches of feathers dyed in all the shades of the rainbow which adorned the walls, and the difficulty with which one engineered one's way across the room without stumbling over the baskets and small footstools, and mounds of stones and shells which adorned the floor.

To-day, however, instead of being closely drawn, in order to serve two purposes, that of keeping out the flies and concealing the thin film of dust which would accumulate somehow, the blinds were run up to their highest, and Mrs. Torrance sat on the extreme edge of the slippery hair-cloth sofa looking on at such a destruction of her household gods as had never been known.

We were ushered in by a small Torrance, and so engrossed was Mrs. Torrance that at first she did not see us.

"My Berlin wreath, Gay!" she was saying, while that small iconoclast, Gay, with her saucy curls tied up in a towel, stood balancing in her two dimpled hands a ponderous creation of pink roses and yellow lilies marvellously wrought in wool, "My Berlin wreath—ye'll not put that away!"

"But it's so out of date, mamma—yes, it must go," said Gay imperiously, plunging the great clumsy thing into the gaping limbo of a box already almost bulging with peacock feathers, paper flowers, and cardboard frames, that stood in the middle of the floor.



Mrs. Torrance looked on dubiously, then, catching sight of us:

"Bless my heart, Miss Tring!—and Peggie! It's good fer sore eyes to git sight o' ye! Here, sit down"—bustling about to get us chairs—"we're in a dreadful muddle to-day"—apologetically—"Gay's been turnin' things upside down generally"—with a proud glance at Gay. "Gay, my dear, run 'n' take that thing off yer head, 'n' put on a clean apron fer the teacher. Now, Miss Tring, what do ye think of puttin' all them things away?"



"Well," said Miss Tring, while I, mentally congratulating Gay on this new order, contrasted this trumpery room with our cozy house at home where Miss Tring's taste had been the ruling genius, "well, I suppose you can spare a few of them if Gay doesn't care for them. You know Mrs. Mallory's things were nearly all burned in the fire, and really, after a time, one scarcely missed them, and there was so much less to dust and fuss over. And after all, nice white curtains, and a few flowers, and bright fires, and some books and pictures seem about all the

decorations one really needs to make things cheerful."

"Yes," said Mrs. Torrance, "Mrs. Mallory's house *does* look uncommon snug, but" —with her motherly pride coming obviously forward again—"Gay 's been gettin' some new notions in the town. She's been makin' some great fancy work. Gay, run 'n' git yer cushions."

Obediently Gay went into the "spare room" and when she returned it was as evident as that Gay ruled the establishment that one set of idols had been displaced only to make room for another.

Proudly Mrs. Torrance displayed the flimsy creations of silk and lace, much too fine to carry with them any suggestion of comfort, while Gay chattered gaily on, telling us how she had got the pattern of this from Bessie Upton, "Lawyer Upton's daughter, you know," and the stitch of that from "Clara Jones, Dr. Jones' sister," until we were in a fair way to know something of all the élite of Saintsbury.

Nevertheless there was something so genu-

inely unaffected about Gay, something so wholesomely friendly, that one could not but like her. As she chattered on of her town life, like a child elated over a new toy, with her dimples coming and going, and her hair tumbling in little kinks about her peach-blossom face, it seemed to me that I was years older than she, and I wondered if I should have felt differently, less solemn and staid, had my path through life been less like mine and more like hers, a round of pleasure and gayety, and getting just what one wanted without care or responsibility. Yet it seemed that Gay was scarcely doing right in taking all the advantages, and running away from the "tother" at home instead of staying to bring order out of the chaos. However, after all, it was Mrs. Torrance's ambition to make a "lady" of Gay, so perhaps the little fairy was not so much to blame.

When we were leaving, Mrs. Torrance insisted that I should call for Gay on the way to the paring-bee, and, as the Torrance homestead was directly on the way between the Clearing and the Might's I willingly consented.



When I was dressing that evening Miss Tring manifested an unusual interest in my toilet.

"That gray suits you, my dear," she said, "but it needs something to brighten it up. Upon so rare an event as a party you should look your prettiest."

"My prettiest!" I laughed, but there was a little sinking of heart with the laugh, for what girl who knows she is plain would not be beautiful? It is not all vanity which prompts such a wish, but the sense of the æsthetic in us, which makes us love to gather flowers, and to look long upon beautiful women. So resigned, however, was I to my plainness that I did not glance even once in the mirror after Miss Tring had fastened a cherry ribbon at my throat, and pronounced it becoming. Instead I thought of a day long ago when I, the little brown mouse, had sat on a lumber-pile, and watched Gay, the butterfly, hovering about. I was the brown mouse still, and Gay the butterfly.

Before I went out, on hearing the rattle of Tom Billings's wagon, in which I had de-

termined to secure a ride as far as the Torrance's, my mother, with some sort of presentiment, as it afterward seemed, called me to her room. She seemed agitated, and before she spoke I knew that what she had to say was connected in some way with the Carmichaels.

"Ye'll be meeting that young Carmichael to-night," she said.

"Probably, mother; what of that?"

"Ye'll not forget," she said, as though half distrustful of me, "that he's *the son o' the man that killed yer father?*" She always spoke of Mr. Carmichael to me as the man who had killed my father.

"I'll not forget."

"And ye'll promise me ye'll hev' nothing to do with him?"

"I promise."

"I'm satisfied then. Ye know my wish in the matter."

My poor little mother. It was the only thing in this world upon which she strongly asserted herself, that I should have nothing to do with the Carmichaels; and, as I gave such ready

assent to her will that evening, I little thought how soon and how severely my own will was to be tested.



Gay met me at the door of the parlour which, wonderfully metamorphosed since the morning, and all pink in the light of a lamp draped in a new red silk shade, looked very inviting.

"Come right in, Peggie," she said, making haste to place me in the largest armchair. "How nice you look! Now then, tell me if you think my dress is pretty," and she spun round before me, a bewildering flutter of soft pink and cream lace, while her mother looked on, so tired-looking, but the proudest of mothers..

"We can't go just yet," she said, sitting down upon the sofa, and arranging the new cushions most bewitchingly about her, "because Dick Carmichael's going to call. It was *so* good of him! I was talking about how dreadfully afraid I am of the dark, so he said he'd come as I might feel safer with him than just with Choddy. Afterward Hud Jamieson told Toddy he was coming too. I think he might have called to ask permission, don't you? But we'll have one apiece, my dear."

In our quiet little district, you will see, this arrangement could cause no comment. Upon all such occasions as parties, and meetings in the church, it was a time-honoured custom that the lads and lasses should go unchaperoned, the lads holding it as an honoured right to see the lasses safely home, and never dreaming of presuming upon the privilege. Only once, indeed, in the whole history of our community, had there been a lapse from virtue within its borders, and so great had been the horror consequent upon it that *he* had fled the country, and *she*, unable to face the fury of her father, her only living parent, had gone out to service somewhere. Poor Jean Moffat—but once did she return, and that was to her father's deathbed. Folk said he forgave her, and died with his head on her breast. But that did not alter the fact that but seldom, then or after, was Jean Moffat's name spoken, and that with bated breath.

As I watched Gay Torrance that evening, for I could not keep my eyes off her, I thought again that the little drama of the mouse and the butterfly was being enacted over again,

only that Gay was now a much more radiant butterfly. From the tip of her tiny slipper to the top of her shining head, she was daintiness itself, and, as she talked, with the dimples coming and going in her cheeks, and her eyes sparkling with merriment, I wondered if this earth could provide anything fairer to look at; and when Dick Carmichael and Hud Jamieson came in I felt they must think so too.

I had seen so little of either of them during the last few years that it seemed like meeting them anew. Hud had indeed grown into a very handsome young man, slight and rather undersized, to be sure, but with a vivacity of expression, and a little way of saying things as though he had kept them just for you, which promised to make him, on occasion, rather dangerously attractive. As for Dick, he stalked into the room, straight and strong of limb and broad of shoulder, a veritable Carmichael, but with a severe and solemn countenance little like that of the boy, Dick, with whom I had roved the fields in those happy days of long ago. When he spoke, in a low voice, yet rich and deep as that of his father,



it was as though he thought life a serious matter, not to be frittered away in trivialities; yet it was for Dick that Gay had all her smiles, and all her bright chatter; and when she talked to him, moving her hands, with all the soft roundness of her arms showing to the elbow, where the dainty frills of lace covered them, with the colour burning in her cheeks and the excitement in her eyes, she looked the most winsome creature in the world, and I thought it but little wonder that Dick should look at her and occasionally break forth into one of the rare smiles that transformed his face, or yet more rarely into the deep laugh which belonged to none but the Carmichaels.

It was surely enough that he had spoken to me courteously. Long ago he had come to know fully of the edict which my mother had issued in regard to our friendship, and he had never presumed. I, too, was I not in honour bound to have naught to do with the house of Carmichael? And had I not, though my reason exonerated Dick of any complicity in his father's misdeeds, kept that honour in all faithfulness? Why, then, should a little sore

spot come into my heart as he talked to Gay, and why, though I hated and despised myself for the weakness, should I strain my ears to hear what they were saying, while Hud Jamieson's platitudes, uttered in his peculiarly musical tones, came to me as a far-off tinkling?

Utterly demeaned in my own conscience, ashamed so that I felt the hot blood surging in my cheeks, I compelled myself at last to attend, and even to talk with unusual gayety to Hud, even when it came time to go, and Dick, placing Gay's cloak about her shoulders, passed out of the door with her without even a glance at me.

Again I resolved not to care, and clenched my hands until the nails hurt the flesh in determination, but was so little successful that the evening passed to me like a weary dream in which I was compelled to act a part, while everywhere before me danced a vision of Gay smiling at Dick, talking to Dick, although Hud Jamieson, too, now hovered near her, darting to catch up her handkerchief, or to perform any other such small gallantry as presented itself.

As I had surmised, the apple-paring was continued for but little of the time, and good Amanda Might had full satisfaction in seeing all the old Hallowe'en games which had delighted her on that memorable night of her youth—played over again. With the supper, too, came the culmination of her happiness. The girls carried up dainties from the cellar, until it seemed as though there were no end to them, while the boys found enough to do in passing about the clear fresh cider and hot coffee.

For my part I felt little enough like eating, and after a sip of cider and a bite of berry pie for looks' sake, I slipped out of the open door and stood near it. It was a wonderfully warm night for the first of November, for the Indian summer had come early that year, yet the moist fresh air seemed to cool my brow and leave me better able to think.

And as I pondered there the feeling of dull pain—which I, poor child, in my ignorance of the world other than my own small one and its passions, had not yet learned to define as jealousy, much less to determine the cause

of—gave gradually away to a sort of resigned sadness that my old playfellow had passed out of my life forever; and, with the peculiar tenacity with which the slightest incidents of my life kept recurring to me, flashing upon me often when uncalled, I thought of that day far up in the wood near the raspberry-grown line fence, the day upon which Dick had straightened his shoulders and declared what he would do when he was a man, while I, small mite, feared only that he would pass out of my life. The memory of that day brought up a host of other and sadder memories, and I stood there, quite losing account of time until Mrs. Might came bustling out.

"My sakes, Peggie, what are ye standin' there fer? Don't say now 'twas that bite o' berry pie made ye sick?"

"No, no, I'm very well, thank you. It's lovely and cool out here."

"But mercy me, ye'll take cold with nothin' on yer head in the night air! Come right in! I've a cup o' coffee all ready fer ye, more 'n' half cream it is. I kept Bess's cream—

she's the best Jersey ye know—jist fer to-night."

So I had to go in and please her by drinking the coffee; and soon it was time to go home.

"Ye'll not hev' to git Adam to go home with ye to-night, Peg," whispered Mrs. Might with well-meaning kindness but rather doubtful tact. "I picked them very careful, even numbers, 'n' every one o' them came."

But it mattered little who came home with me, and when the girls filed out into the night, looking neither to the right nor to the left, but with self-consciousness born of the uncertainty as to "who it was to be" in every motion, I lagged behind for a last few words with Mrs. Might.

When ready to set out, it appeared to my confusion that none other than Dick Carmichael had fallen to my lot as escort. Adam Might was just coming in with him at a side door, and, evidently not ill-pleased, was saying:

"Not too late after all, Dick, boy. The best girl o' the bunch is here waitin' fer ye!"

With crimsoning cheeks I glanced at Dick,

then at Mrs. Might; then, to hide my confusion, went rapidly down the steps, Dick, following.

Not a word was spoken until we had reached the garden gate, and I had time to think.

"Dick," I said, "I shall have to go back and get Mr. Might to come with me. You—you understand—you know——"

"I know the laws of the Medes and Persians," he said, "and I think the laws of the Medes and Persians utterly unreasonable, if I may be permitted to say so."

"Nevertheless they must be obeyed," I rejoined quickly. "Really, Dick, I must go back!"

"Don't you think they are outlawed?" he went on, in a half-bantering tone that exasperated me.

"No," I returned, sharply, and, turning, began to retrace my steps to the house.

The next instant he had taken me by the arm and turned me about.

"See here, Peggie," he said, in a very different tone, "don't you know you can't do that? What's the use of publishing all that

miserable business, as you must do to some extent, if you go back there into Might's? Anyway, this arrangement has neither been of your nor of my seeking. We have been thrown into it, and must abide by it, however disagreeable it may be, and, so far as I can see, no wrong for either of us in it, either."

"But I promised——"

"I know all that you promised. All the same, as I said before, neither you nor I planned for this. It is an accident, and neither of us can be blamed for it."

Feeling that there was some reason in what he said, swayed also by his masterfulness, I began to walk slowly on again, and so we went silently through the gate.

In spite of myself a sense of satisfaction came to me as we came out on the road, yet I felt as though such a feeling were treason. "Ye 'll remember he 's the son o' the man that killed yer father!" my mother had said, and I *was* remembering, yet what could I do? I could not now prevent Dick Carmichael from walking home with me, but I could at least fight against being pleased over the accident.



So I resolved to be very stiff and dignified indeed, and to let Dick know that I by no means approved of the way in which things had fallen.

Thus we walked silently for quite a way, I at one side of the road, he at the other, then he said suddenly:

"Peggie, I 'm not going to bear with this any longer!"

"With what?"

"This dreadful secret that I have been carrying about with me all these years, ever since the night of—the fire. Peggie, I can't think father ever set fire to that barn! To me he seems the soul of honour! *Surely* it was someone else you saw that night!"

"No," I said slowly, for I could not lie, and why should I try to screen Henry Carmichael, of all men? "No, Dick, it was your father that I saw. I was not mistaken."

Dick was silent for a moment, then he said, in a low, worried tone, "And I—I heard him come in! . . . And after a moment he said to me 'Come, Dick, Mallory's barn is on fire!'" . . . And I, too, with you, heard him threaten

to be even with your father. . . . Oh Peggie, Peggie"—and there was something akin to agony in his voice—"suspicion is enough to kill a man! It has been wearing my heart out by inches all these years. I can't believe, and yet I am compelled to believe. A thousand times it has been on my tongue to ask my father why he was abroad that night, how it was that he, in the depths of the night, was the *first* to see that Mallory's barn was afire, and yet I have shrunk from even hinting to him that I had suspicion of his motives. But, Peggie, it must be done. To-morrow or, at least, very soon, I shall ask him!"

"Yes, that will be the better way," I whispered, in a voice scarcely audible, for I was trembling from head to foot.

For an instant Dick strode on, forgetting me, then waited until I came up and resumed his walk along the farther side of the road, with the width of the wagon way between us.

"Whether that thing be—be true or not," he said, "it will be the hardest crack my father ever got—my mentioning it to him.

If it be not true, then he will know that the son who should have trusted him and whom he has loved—for he does love me, Peggie—has been a miserable, suspicious cur, unworthy of him or his affection. If it be true" —with a sort of savagery—"then let him enjoy the hell he has made for himself!"

Through sheer nervousness I broke down utterly, and the sobs which I had been choking back shook me.

He stopped for an instant and looked at me, then came over to me and took my arm.

"Why, Peggie," he said, in that low, caressing tone so, so like that in which his father had spoken to me that day so long ago when, as a little child, he had held me in his arms in the sheep-house, "why, Peggie, what a brute I am to have made you cry! Oh, girl, girl, I forgot myself! I am a great, careless, clumsy brute—but I'm not much used to girls, Peggie."

There was genuine distress in his voice, and I hurriedly wiped away the tears.

"It 's all right," I said, "I 'm just—just nervous or something. There, come on!"



And again we walked silently under the calm, clear sky, with the trees on either side of the road murmuring a lullaby, sweet enough and low enough to sooth a fevered spirit.

And now we had come opposite to the little garden, and the spot where had been the old house, and beyond the meadow field lay, all brown with the upturned sod, beneath the steady light of the moon.

"Do you remember the old call, Peg?" he said, dropping into the old name of my childhood. "I wonder if I could do it now." And immediately he began to whistle softly the song sparrow's call, the three quavering notes, and a long, wild trill.

With the warble the memories of the old days came trooping up so keenly that it seemed but yesterday since we had roamed the familiar fields together; and when he began to talk of the pranks we played, I forgot that it was my duty to be angry, and only knew that I was very contented to be walking again with Dick, and living over again the sweet days of long ago.

As we approached the woods surrounding the Clearing the mud on the road grew deeper, and tiny pools began to show all silver in the moon-light.

"We will cross the fields the rest of the way," Dick said presently, "it will be drier that way."



And so I let him help me over the fence, and even take my arm to steady me as we walked over the uneven surface of the field.

Beyond the next fence there was a strip of ploughed land which I had quite forgotten. Above it a dense, white mist was arising, yet lying low and heavy, so that the whole expanse looked like a ghostly, glittering lake, with a soft spray dashing silently up against the clumps of trees which arose like islands from the calm, white surface.

"Oh!" I said, "this will be dreadful walking! We must go back." But Dick said no; that I should get my feet wet if we went back over the wet bush road.

"I'll carry you, Sis," he said, "as I used to —over the swampy places, do you remember?"

And without a word I let him take me in his strong arms and stride into the receding mist, carrying me.

Very strange and unreal it all seemed, we two, plunging into the midst of that silent lake, which gave way in a little circle about us, then stretched off, dense and white, to the black woods beyond. Yet I had no sensation save that which a little child feels in being carried over a difficult way. I was in a sort of dreamland; and it was so pleasant to be with Dick again, and to know that he was not vexed with me, but that we were still the good old friends.

And yet, as he talked, in his deep, low voice, it seemed, too, as though it were not he, but Henry Carmichael who was carrying me so carefully in his arms. Again I heard the voice, that other voice so strangely like, ask playfully, "Do you hate me now?" and that other childish one find the ready answer, "No."

When the weird lake was passed, Dick put me down again, and presently, after passing through the dense wood, we saw the light

glimmering through the trees from the Clearing.

The sight of it raised all my apprehensions again, and all my burning self-denunciation. I had permitted Dick to come home with me; I had even been friendly with him, and had let him take me in his arms and carry me over the ploughed land—I whom my mother had trusted!

Silently we passed up the path toward the house, and about us the corn stooks, awaiting the winter hauling, stood black and still. For the first time in my life I dreaded going home, and felt that I should like to hide away in the black shadows.

"Oh, Dick!" I burst out presently, "This is all wrong, wrong! I wish I had never gone to the party! This must never occur again!"

For a moment Dick stood quite still, looking into my face.

"I'm sorry, Peg," he said stiffly. "If you are going to worry like this, I promise you it will not happen again if *I* can prevent it. Good-night."

Abruptly, as had ever been his way when irritated, he left me, while I went to my room to cry over having angered Dick and been false to my mother—and to live over again, in every detail, the events of this, to me, eventful evening.



CHAPTER XI

IN THE MIDST OF THE BATTLE

THEY were all at breakfast when I went down next morning, Chris, Miss Tring, and my mother. Miss Tring had to hear all about the party; but my mother kept glancing at me nervously—while I could not look her in the face at all—and said never a word until Miss Tring had gone to school, and Chris had hobbled out to his choring.

Then she sat down, as though unable to go on with her work until rid of that which was on her mind.

"Dick Carmichael would be at the bee?" she remarked, interrogatively.

I felt the hot blood surge to my forehead and bent my head.

"Yes, mother."

"He didn't try to speak with ye?"

"Yes, mother; he came home with me."

"Oh, Peggie, after yer promise to me!"

My mother got up and walked to the window, with a look of bitter hardness on her face, and I flew to her.

"He came home with me, mother," I repeated, "but we didn't plan for it, mother, neither he nor I, and it just seemed that it had to be that way!"

Having begun, it seemed as though I must go on and confess all, if that would loosen from me the terrible sense of double-dealing under which I was burdened.

"And I let him carry me over the ploughed ground," I went on, feverishly. "And mother, I needn't have done that, and now I know it was wrong, wrong to you. But, mother, it seemed so natural, so much like old times, I just drifted into it, and I think Dick did too. I didn't mean to do wrong to you then, mother, indeed I didn't—and I only came to think of it all in the right way afterward!"

My mother had listened to me, standing very erectly, and with that hard expression on her face which I had observed on it when she had addressed Henry Carmichael.

"You let *him* carry ye," she repeated, with

bitter scorn. "*The son o' the man that killed yer father!*"

Not a word more could I say, and dropping into a chair I put my face in my apron, and wept.

Presently, and much to my surprise, she knelt beside me, and, pushing back my head so that she could see me, looked long and anxiously into my face. Not for many a long day afterward did the meaning of that long anxious look dawn upon me. But my eyes met hers unflinchingly, for now I had told her the truth.

"Indeed mother, I did not promise to let him come with me," I said, and then I told her all the story.

"I believe ye, Peggie," she said, when I had finished, "fer never onst, even when ye were a little girl, did ye lie to me. I s'pose it seemed natural, as ye say, fer ye were great friends when ye were little, 'n' that was my fault, not yours. I s'pose, too, when ye tried to go back, that he forced himself on ye, fer that's the rough, go-ahead way o' the Carmichaels, 'n' Dick's gettin' every day to be more a chip

o' the old block, so they say. But look ye here, Peggie"—with the hard, strained voice returning—"if ye care anything about yer old mother and the memory o' yer father, ye'll keep clear, from this day out, from Dick Carmichael."

"I will have nothing to do with him. *Indeed* I will not talk with him again," I said, ready to promise anything in the depth of my contrition, for, whatever Dick might be, would it not be ill-fitting enough for me to have aught more to say to the son of the man who had wrought us such ill, and who had, perhaps, as my mother believed, been the cause, if the indirect cause, of my poor father's tragic death?

My mother put her hand on my hair and stroked it gently.

"Ye're a good girl, Peggie," she said, "if ye weren't ye wouldn't ha' fretted so. . . . Well, well, after all no harm 's done, 'n' if Dick carried ye over the muddy ploughin', why it saved yer boots, fer ye couldn't ha' picked your steps goin' through the bush road in the dark; 'n' it 'ud ha' been a pity to



ha' spoiled them nice new ones. I know ye'll keep yer promise, Peggie. Ye're a good girl, 'n' ye've been a great help to me on the farm."

So the interview passed over less disastrously than I had anticipated, and when I arose and began to go about my daily duties, it was almost joyfully. Now that my promise had been again given I would keep it. From this time henceforth I would have nothing whatever to do with Dick Carmichael, and would be able to look my mother in the face without shame. So I sang, free as a bird in the glad sense of emancipation that comes of feeling that one has made a good resolution and cut off a bond that would fetter.

But alas for human nature! When the strenuous work of the morning was over, and I had time to sit and think over my sewing, I found myself living over and over again the events of the preceding night, walking with Dick up the calm, moonlit road, climbing the fence with him, listening to his low, deep voice, plunging again into the lake of mist with his arms bearing me high and dry above the muddy, uneven ground.

Again and again, with the consciousness of doing wrong by even permitting myself to think, and that so pleasantly, of that quiet walk with Dick, I beat away the memory of it, and forced my thoughts upon something else. And at every struggle old Chris's maxims would ring in my ears: "It's what's *behind* the actions 'n' the words that counts most—fer yerself. If ye think what's wrong 'n' keep thinkin' on it, it's jist the same to yerself as if ye acted on it. The only difference is that others doesn't suffer from it."

But strive as I would, the sweet, alluring pictures would creep back again before I was well aware of their coming, just as though I were in possession of some evil spirit that kept thrusting them upon me. Whenever my mother came near I averted my eyes, and once when she laid her hand on my shoulder, for she seemed unusually affectionate that day, I shrank from her touch mentally as though it burned.

Once, too, I remember, I cried to myself fiercely, "Am I responsible for this?" Yet

my conscience could but answer "Aye," and I was not comforted.

So the afternoon passed, and I was glad enough, shortly after Miss Tring came home from school, to be diverted by the sight of old Yorkie Dodd, redder and fatter than ever, waddling up the path to the house.

He had taken to coming of late, and the peculiarity of his actions had been such as to yield us all some amusement. So long as it was warm enough to stay out of doors, and he could sit with Chris on the bench, he was voluble enough, and could pour out his woes in plenty about how hard it was for his old sister (who had long since come to keep house for him) to get about the work, and have the meals ready on time; and how little comfort there was for any man who had lost "the missus." But whenever he crossed the threshold a great change came over him. Then, for the most part, he would sit without a word, staring at the floor. At the table, too, for Yorkie always came before meal-time, he seemed to be seized by an unaccountable bashfulness that even affected his appetite,



for now he ate no longer than Chris, and more than once, indeed, he declined a second helping with a fortitude worthy of a better cause.

"Poor man," my mother would say when he had gone, "I suppose he doesn't git much good to eat at home, 'n' it 's a comfort to him to hev' a meal that 's cooked proper. Not that we ever hev' sich great dainties, but, if I do say it myself, unless it's Amanda Might's, there's no vittles cooked better in Oroway—sich as we hev'."

This evening, however, there was a variation in the programme. Although it was still warm, almost, as June, and Chris, in spite of his "rheumatics" was still out of doors, Yorkie came in directly, and put his hat under his chair with an unusual air of business.

"Good evenin', mems," he said, in return to the polite salutation which we, my mother, Miss Tring, and I, gave him.

"And how's yer sister?" asked my mother, following the routine of questions which had come to be a matter or course on Yorkie's visits.

"Indeed, mem, she's not very well," he drawled, more briskly than usual, "an old wumman finds it hard to do what 'ud be only play to a younger one. It's the old story about the grasshopper bein' a burden. Sairy, yer know, 's a lot older 'n me. She's me oldest sister."

"But she's able to be about?"

"Yes mem, oh yes, it's not that. But ye see things hes been prosperin', 'n' there's a good deal to attend to. I've six cows, 'n' one comin' in next spring. Fine handlin' that makes fer a wumman, mem, if she's spry 'n' able to attend to 't, 'n' butter the price it is. . . . 'N' I've eight little pigs, besides four big ones ready fer the market, with *sich* meat on them! Lord! ye never saw sich slabs o' bacon! . . . Then there's the young cattle, mem, as fine a bunch as ever ye saw! Not as a wumman 'ud be expected to see to *them*, but it shows ye how things hes been prosperin'. . . . 'N' sheep, fourteen, mem, as 'll double themselves come March in ord'nary calkilation. Mem, ye ought to see my sheep!"

Having delivered himself of this unusual peroration, Yorkie reverted to his customary silence and staring at the floor.

At the tea-table, too, he seemed more than ordinarily preoccupied, and hurried through with such despatch that he had finished before any of us.

Immediately afterward he got up with an air of much business and addressed himself to the teacher.

"Mem, will ye come down the path fer a minute?"

Miss Tring looked up in a puzzled way; then, with her sweet smile she said readily:

"Certainly. Do you want to talk to me about something?" and followed him out through the doorway.

"Everybody comes to Miss Tring fer advice," said my mother, as they passed down toward the corn-stooks, "but who'd ha' thought old Yorkie 'ud take his turn! It's a good thing fer *you*, Peggie, as I've said many a time, to hev' sich a woman in the house. . . . Not as I'd keep every teacher that 'ud come along—but a woman like Miss Tring

that everybody looks up to, 'n' as neat 'n' tidy as a new pin about her room."

We had cleared away the dishes and set about the evening work before Miss Tring came back. Then she came alone, and, slipping quietly in at the front-door, went immediately up to her room..

When I went to mine to wash my hands and brush my hair after the milking, she called me. She was sitting on the edge of the bed, and although her eyes were dancing with smiles, I could see that she had been crying.

"Tell me, Peggie," she said, " have I got to be dreadfully old and—and—ugly?"

I stared in astonishment.

"Why no," I said, "I think you are *lovely!* Why?"

She went to the mirror and, taking out the pins, let the rich masses of her hair fall. Then she took up strand after strand, in which the silver threads were beginning to show.

"Yes, yes," she said, coming back to the bed, "I must be getting very old, and people are so sorry for old maids, and—and—think they are ready to be satisfied with any-

thing. . . . Peggie," beginning to laugh until tears, not all of merriment, ran down her cheeks, "Old Yorkie Dodd proposed to me to-night!"

"Proposed to *you*?"

"Yes, actually proposed to me to go up and take care of his six cows, and his eight little pigs, and the dear knows what not, and take him to boot."

"The audacity!" I exclaimed, all of my contempt in my face. "If he *knew* anything——"

But Miss Tring held up a warning finger.

"Poor old man," she said, "after all it was the highest compliment he knew how to pay me. I would be very wrong in being angry with him. But——"

"It 's the way they all do!" I interrupted, jealous for Miss Tring's prestige, "The widowers I mean! They run around after all the girls, as Yorkie's been doing for the past ten years, then wind up by marrying some old post—like that old Jennings who proposed to half the girls in Oroway, and finished by marrying old Widow Smith, who is deaf and squints!"

"I didn't mind, dear," she said, with a sad little smile, "only that—oh, it all seemed such a caricature after——"

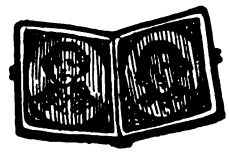
She stopped to wipe the tears away silently from her cheeks; and then I noticed, on her pillow, a little morocco case, with clasps and ornaments of filigree silver.

"You may look at it," she said; and opening it I found two miniatures, one of herself, a girl in the first flush of maiden beauty, radiant, smiling; the other of a man with a broad, intellectual brow, and keen, deep eyes.

"I thought I should never show it to anyone," she said, leaning her head on me, while I put my arm about her, "but you have become very dear to me, Peggie."

"And it was he—" I began.

"Whom I should have married if he had lived," she said, softly.



CHAPTER XII

A DISCOVERY

UPON the following morning I set out, as I so often did, upon horseback, to make a tour of the farm, this to be a final one to see that all was in good order before winter.

As I rode slowly along, nearer and nearer to Carmichael's farm, I was annoyed to find that the consciousness of Dick and the Carmichaels was again uppermost. Instead of attending to my own fields I found myself looking across at Carmichael's, noting the improvements, and marking how much fall ploughing had been done—so many, many furrows, straight and even, as only Dick could plough; and instead of hurrying to get through and to my sewing, I was presently looking idly at the trees about the Carmichael home, and thinking of how sweet and kind Mrs. Carmichael was, and wondering whether she were as frail that fall as usual.

As I rode nearer to the back barn, however,

Yet, too, after Dick's d
explanation who knew
With sinking heart I
further, then my wors
for, standing out in th
father, I could see Dick
his pockets, evidently li
while his father stormed.
I urged my horse on,
have to say was no afl
morning air was still;
of thunder would not l
poor Dick, who had be
all those years, and wh
wrung because of the on
was daring to upbraid h
How *could* he fault Dic
ly—he who had done so
worse than all, had tried

deeds and had fancied himself successful! How strange it was that all the other neighbours had little but good to say of Henry Carmichael! . . . And yet, it had been my father only whom he had hated! And he had had his revenge!

At the old home spot I drew rein and got off. It had been my mother's fancy to have it left untouched, except to cut out the weeds, and so, through all these years the phlox, and sunflowers, and the meadow-sweet, had grown up and blossomed, and the lilac bushes and snowdrops had spread into great masses. Under the leafless cherry trees the grass was quite long and dry, so I lay down there to think.

This morning I did a sort of fierce penance in looking at the charred heap of stones piled up where the house had been, and at the depression beyond which marked the site of the old barn; one by one I called up the details of that night before me, and held them there, as one presses on an aching tooth. Above all did I dwell on that short and fatal interview between my father and Carmichael, and

was almost glad when I found the old resentment against my father's enemy, which had sometimes slept, rising bitter as ever in my heart. I must never see more of Dick Carmichael. I had promised; and it was well that every reason for our utter separation should be vividly before me.

It was a last act of renunciation that I was performing there in the forsaken garden, with the dry grasses shaking about me, and the crisp, brown lilac leaves rustling like paper on the lilac bushes; and, resolute once more, I got up and led Prince out through the gateway.

As I turned to shut the gate I heard a step on the hard road, and looking up, saw the last one whom I wished to meet—Dick Carmichael, striding toward me with a grip in his hand.

Before I could mount he was close to me.

"Peggie? Again?" he said, with a grim smile. "At least I am not sorry to have the opportunity of saying good-bye."

"You—you are going away?" I said.

"Yes," he said, then stood for a moment

looking very far away, with serious eyes, while I, my brain in a whirl, stood clinging to my horse's mane, and wondering if Carmichael's rage had driven Dick away.

Something pitiable about me must have touched him, for, in a moment, when he looked at me again, his countenance changed instantly, and he came very close to me and laid his hand on my shoulders.

"We part friends?" he said.

"Yes—oh, yes!"

"Good-bye—Peggie."

An instant longer he stood looking into my face, and I—I could only look down and tremble. Two days ago, less than that, he had carried me through the ploughed field, and I had thought no more of it than a child. To-day the touch of his fingers thrilled me as though some strange, delightful current were coursing through every vein. A mad joy that he was touching me, looking at me, calling me "Peggie," oh, so tenderly; then a wild sense of grief that he was going away from me, perhaps forever—yes, forever, for did not I know, even better than he, the

insuperable barrier between us—then, he was gone!

Once he half-turned as though to come back, then strode on again, while I stood watching him with the tears blinding my eyes, and that new, strange tumult surging through me.

I could not mount Prince. I must watch Dick while there was even an outline of him striding down the road, and up the long hill that must hide him from view. So I stood there until the last speck of him had disappeared over the hill; then, not wishing to go home until I had my countenance under a little better control, I led Prince back into the garden again, and threw myself down on the long, dry grass under the cherry trees. . . . Where was Dick going? Why, oh, why had I not asked him? To know would have been, at least, a little satisfaction. . . . And would he *never* come back? And how would his mother feel about it? Oh, Henry Carmichael was cruel, cruel! . . . Dick would probably run down the river to Ildering, our nearest station, from which we were divided by a long range of cliffs about which

the highway made a long deviation, although they parted just enough to let the river through in a great torrent, safe enough to pass, however, when the river was low.

But was the river low now? Or was it not flooded from the heavy rains which had preceded our Indian summer? . . . If Dick should be dashed to pieces in the rapids! . . . Oh, were the tragedies of Mallory and Carmichael never to end! And so I tortured myself until it seemed as though I were in some way responsible for this quarrel between Dick and his father, and for Dick's leaving, and for all the dreadful things that might happen in consequence of it.

At last the rattle of wheels aroused me, and, not willing to be seen lying so disconsolately on the grass, I sat up.

The next instant Henry Carmichael dashed past, driving like mad. I could see his face, though he looked neither to right nor to left, and it was that of a man who rides as for a life.

"He is sorry for what he has done, and he has gone to bring Dick back!" I thought, and

Could he reach Dick
landing? Impossible, I
be already, had he been
a boat, well on his way t
not leave until I knew, a
lie on the grass under th
the garden feverishly, wa
every turn.

Presently a black spe
growing larger as a bug
the hill. Could it be
so slowly as that?

Hours seemed to pa
came near enough for rec
now I could see—there
it. . . . A little ne
michael's buggy, and C
ing *alone!* He had mis
had refused to be concil

Nearer and nearer! th

the lilac bushes, and waited, with my heart thumping so that I could hear it.

A moment later and Carmichael drove slowly past, but years it seemed, had gone over him since he had gone on that fruitless journey. He was bowed as a broken man; the reins hung loosely in his hands; and his horse, all wet and streaked with foam, walked along with its head down as though it were scarcely able even to walk more.

When the last sign of him had disappeared, I led Prince out once more, and, mounting, rode slowly toward home.

Though my heart was sore, I was yet conscious of a mad exultation whose cause I could not all define. The touch of Dick's fingers was still upon my shoulder, and although I knew he had gone, and perhaps forever, it was as though I had discovered that within me which transcended all separations, all barriers, which was mine, and mine alone; and when thought of aught else intruded I drove it resolutely away. The time of repentance in sackcloth and ashes would come—I knew that—but for the present it was enough to

exist in a wild, mad delirium, into which the thought that Dick had gone, and unhappily, came back and back again like a sharp pain piercing to the heart of me. And yet even the pain was sweet since Dick had seemed sorry at parting.

All the rest of that day I worked mechanically, my hands moving of themselves while my lips were still.

"Gracious sakes alive!" said my mother, more than once, "What 's the matter with ye? Ye don't seem to be puttin' neither heart nor reason into yer work! I do hope ye 're not goin' to take the fever. It 's the time o' year."

Her persistent inquiries as to what was the matter with me, at last stimulated me to wonder myself what was the matter. Accustomed to self-analysis, which, somehow, had become a sort of habit with me, I wondered more and more, and at last—as I slowly brushed my hair that night in my little room, it dawned upon me that this must be the thing called love.

Almost gasping as the thought, I sat down

on my bed, too terrified, almost, to stand. . . . Had it come to this, that I loved the son of the man who had robbed, and, yes, perhaps had "killed" my father? That I loved the very one whom I had been forbidden to see, and had, indeed, promised not to see? The one whom, above all others, my mother could not abide?

Oh, it must be impossible! And yet, why did I thrill even now at the memory of Dick's touch and voice? Why did I think of his absence with a sickening loneliness? Why did I feel rebellious at the bonds which, unyielding as fetters of iron, would bind me from him?



I know well that girls who find themselves in love are given to hiding the precious thing; to wandering off by themselves, and smiling in secret, with the glow in their cheeks, and the light in their eyes. But then, these are the girls to whom love comes differently. For me—well, perhaps my training in the Clearing had left me not like others. At all events, my one desire was to know if this awful thing which I fancied I had discovered was indeed true.

Thinking of it, suddenly the little incident of the night before—how it opened the wells of sympathy between Miss Tring and my poor, groping little self!—came before me. I would ask Miss Tring.

Without further consideration I went into her room. She was in bed and the light was out. For this last I was thankful, for it seemed that I must be able to talk better when there was no light to reveal the burning of my cheeks.

"Miss Tring."

"Yes, dear."

I sat down beside her, and put my arms about her.



"Miss Tring, I want to ask you, for you know, Miss Tring, is it *love* when the image of someone stays with you every moment that you are awake, and when you go over every little thing he has said a hundred times? . . . And oh, Miss Tring, is it love that makes you do things you have decided not to do, and keep thinking about people when you know you oughtn't to think about them,

and that it would only bring trouble and misery to others if they knew?"

I was becoming rather incoherent in my speech, but I knew Miss Tring understood, for, when I paused I felt her arms tighten about me.

"Is it Dick Carmichael?" she asked, softly.

"Yes."

For a long time she was silent; then she said, "Has he told you he cares for you?"

With the question came, for the first time, the chilling revelation that my dream-castle had, perhaps, been all of my own building; and in the shame of that revelation, I saw it tumble down stone by stone, and its rosy lines all turn to ashen gray.

"N-no," I stammered, "but he—he talked in such a tone—oh, I can't tell you!"

"Then," said Miss Tring, stroking my hair. "I think it will be better for you not to think of him now."

"Miss Tring, I can't help it," I burst forth, "I've thought of nothing else for two days, and how am I to fight off the thoughts that come to me, and come to me, in spite of

myself. I thought I was strong—but I'm *so* weak."

Very gently the soft voice came out of the darkness:

"I know."

"Miss Tring," I said, after a long pause, "I suppose it was dreadful to keep thinking of Dick when he never really told me—and yet—do people ever get over loving?"

"Some do," she said, " and very quickly. I don't know about you, Peggie, but I think there may be a hard struggle before you. If things were different—but, under the circumstances I think it will be better for you to forget Dick if you can. After all, it's our struggling that makes us brave and strong. We need it, perhaps, or we would not have it thrust upon us. And by and by, girlie, the way will open out before you, the way in which you should go. You remember what Carlyle says: 'Do the Duty which lies nearest thee, which thou knowest to be a Duty! Thy second Duty will already have become clearer.' . . . For the present you must work, work whether you want to or not; then, after

a while the way will be clear. Our difficulties usually disentangle themselves for us, if we only go on bravely, doing what seems right whatever befall."

"I suppose," I said, "I should be glad that Dick has gone."

"I think it may make things easier for you now," she said. "When he comes back you will be older, and will know your own mind better—you know that is the joy of growing older—and then, well, perhaps things will be different."

There was an implied hopefulness in Miss Tring's words—for she had always liked Dick—but from this my saner sense told me I could take but little cheer. After all, what did Miss Tring know of the real relations between the Carmichaels and the Mallorys? How could she even guess at the impenetrability of the barrier which must stand between Dick and me for ever and ever?

And so I went back to the old way, and yet not the old way. How often in life some event happens which robs the sunshine of its

brightest gleam; the wind of its crispest, keenest elixir; the music of the great world of all save the minors that are played, sad-fingered, upon the soul! . . . How often in life, too, do the hands that work, and the lips that answer calmly, even smilingly, but serve as the screen to hide struggles whose record is but writ on tablets that none who run may read! Ah me, I think that in the summing up of the world's great battles, the most stubborn may be found to have been fought in the Thermopylæ of the human heart.

With me, for long enough, such conflicts came to be of almost daily occurrence, especially after times of sweet dreaming of Dick, when, loathing myself for what I considered my weakness, I tried to put the knife to every natural impulse of my heart. Thus I struggled until at last, at the very thought of Dick, I would resolutely place before me, as it were, one small groove in which I must walk, at the farther end of which two pictures stood ever for my warning: one of a huge form walking down a dark lane where the lightning had cut the blackness of the night; the other

of my dear father's face, as he raised his accusing hand before the face of Henry Carmichael.

Sometimes, too, when the battle seemed unusually hard, I would take down our old copy of Bunyan's immortal work, with its quaint pictures, and read the account of Christian's encounter, in the Valley of Humiliation, with the foul fiend Apollyon.

> But now, in this Valley of Humiliation, poor Christian was hard put to it, for he had gone but a little way before he espied a foul fiend coming over the field to meet him; his name is Apollyon. Then did Christian begin to be afraid, and to cast in his mind whether to go back, or to stand his ground. But he considered again that he had no armour for his back, and therefore thought that to turn the back to him, might give him greater advantage with ease to pierce him with his darts; therefore he resolved to venture, and stand his ground, for, thought he, had I no more in mine eye than the saving of my life, it would be the best way to stand.

Was it always in the Valley of Humiliation that one must fight his battles? After all, could I hope to escape, when, as it seemed; to be beset was but human experience? Christian, too, had conquered *his* Apollyon, and why should not I mine, the Apollyon

which declared that I should prove traitor to my mother.

Unfailingly strengthened by the grand old story, I would then go back to my work, and, throwing all my heart and energy into it, find the self-heal mercifully sent with the fall from Eden.

CHAPTER XIII

IN QUIET PATHS

QUIETLY the years slipped away, with so few changes that those which came struck our little community as events of great importance, and afforded talk for a six-month. It is surely this comparative immutability that gives the country its atmosphere of permanence, an atmosphere that sinks into the soul and lives of the people, and is born in the children, so that it is not uncommon that from the country, or directly descended from those who have belonged to it, we receive the most stable of our men.

In the city as a rule, the people and their interests change with the years as the bits of glass change places in the kaleidoscope—ever a uniting and a separating, and a new adjustment that somehow seems as satisfactory as the old. But in the country, for the most part, one generation follows another in the

same old way, and steps at last beneath the quiet green sod in the old churchyard; and if you visit the spot but once in a score of years, you are likely to find the same old names still living in the children, who will tell you anecdotes of the men and women you knew long ago.



There is, perhaps, in the ripple and glint of the city that activity which the world cannot miss; yet it is about the quiet upper pools that the ferns love to nod and the violets to blossom, and he who will choose to amble there is not all the loser.

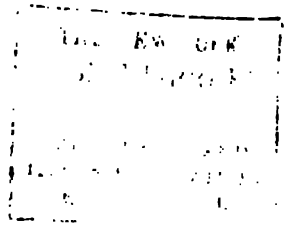
For me, the balm of the country was the balm that I needed, and as the time went on I found it possible once more, except on such rare occasions of melancholia as come to most people, to be happy, and to think of Dick with a quiet resignation which brought me no conscience-pricks.

With the rest, things went along much in the same old way. Chris, much to the delight of us all, gradually regained the health he had lost, save for slight twinges of the "rheumatics." But he would not take



"It is about the quiet upper pools that the ferns love to nod"





back the managing of things into his own hands.

"Why, dash it, girl," he said, when I pressed him to it, "ye've shown *me* a thing or two, 'n' ye're doin' fine! Why should I set up to be punkins when I'm nothin' but a wizzeled up old cucumber? . . . No, no, lassie, I'll jist putter round 'n' chore like, t' earn my bite 'n' my sup, 'n' I'll be proud 'n' honoured to help ye all I can with my tongue. . . . But as fer managin',—no, no, ye'll jist keep on doin' that yourself, lassie."

With my mother, too, the years seemed to bring added health and contentment.

"She's jist like a peach ripenin' on a wall," said Chris; and I often thought his words were apt as I watched her going about, every day more plump and fair, with the pink flush again mounting to its old place on her cheeks.

Upon others, too, my mother's ripe beauty was not lost. Many a one mentioned it, and even Yorkie Dodd took to silent admiration, and resumed his visits, and his staring at the floor.

"D'ye s'pose Yorkie's got an eye to yer

mother?" said Chris to me after three or four of these characteristic visits. "Dash it," in rather conflicting metaphor, "I wish the old lad 'ud git someone that 'ud stop his throat!"

But from the twinkle in the old man's eye, one might have doubted whether he would have foregone the bit of fun which Yorkie's visits afforded him.

For my part I was rather uneasy lest his coming should annoy my mother; but I might have spared myself that fear.

Never have I seen her laugh more heartily than when one day, on coming in from the buttery whence she had sent Yorkie off in high dudgeon, she told us that he had proposed to her; how he had followed her in, and sat on the step, quite filling it, so that she could not get out if she would, and was there "treed like a coon."

"I couldn't git a chance to speak to ye in there, mem," he explained, "with them young chits [Miss Tring, by the way, was considerably over forty] sittin' with their ears open. But I was thinkin' ye'd be a

thrifty wumman to look after things. Wimmen's mighty handy about a place, to cook 'n' that. 'N' I've eight cows, mem, good Shorthorns as ever was bred, mem, 'n' I was thinkin' mebbe ye'd like the handlin' o' them, 'n' could hev' it all jist by writin' yer name 'Missus Dodd.' . . . A ten minit's job 'ud do it, mem."

My mother told us the whole story, laughing between times till she shook, with the tears rolling over her pretty pink cheeks. Poor Yorkie! Did everyone laugh over his love affairs? And yet, who knows—perhaps they meant as much to him as to those cast in finer mould.

"As if I'd think o' marryin' a pork bar'l like him!—'n' at my time o' life!" added my mother; and then the soft faraway look came into her eyes, and presently she went out and began walking up and down the path through the corn.

"Poor little mother!" said Miss Tring, as we watched her glinting in and out among the rank green leaves, with the sunshine on the little, whitening rings of her hair. "Poor

little mother! She, too, is thinking of the long ago."

* * * * *

Of those outside our household, of whom we have spoken in this record, for many a long day there was little of any moment to be told.

Mrs. Might, still adhering to her purpose of mothering the young people of the neighbourhood, since she had no child of her own to mother, continued to keep open house to all the lads and lassies, and, notwithstanding her habit of lecturing now and again, and of giving advice on or without request, had gradually been accorded a place of high favour among her foster children, by whom her peculiarities were soon readily enough overlooked as "just ways of Mrs. Might's."

Gay Torrance, who was severe upon no one else, was the only one who was disposed to be severe upon Mrs. Might. But then there was reason to think that Gay's mode of getting along in the world was so strongly at variance with the time-honoured "way o' the Greens," as by no means to recommend itself to Amanda

Green that was. "She always had a pick at me," explained Gay, one day, with a pretty pout. "And since I've come back from Miss Vincent's school it's been ten times worse. 'Why don't ye show some pluck like Peg Mallory?' she said to me one day, and"—spreading out her little, dimpled, white hands—"how *could* I do as you do, Peggie? You are so tall, and—and—so capable, somehow, and seem just fitted for doing things!" . . . And the two little hands looked so helpless and baby-like that one wanted to kiss them and tell the little fairy that they were just meant to be looked at, and petted, and permitted to do nothing ever. But then, that would have been very foolish.

"You know I do things," she continued. "I make all the cake, and dust the parlour, and iron all my dresses now, frills and all, and really it takes such a time, and I do so *hate* it all! I should like to do just as Bessie Upton does. She just gets up in the morning and puts on a pretty silk negligee, and reads stories till noon; and then she dresses and goes out to tennis tournaments and things,

you know, and has *such* a nice time! Don't you think, Peggie, it's too bad that people have longings for things just in them, somehow, and can't get a single one satisfied?"

To Gay the gospel of work was an incomprehensible one.

"Ugh!" she would say, spreading out her fingers, and turning her pretty face away with an expression of disgust, "I can't see the happiness of just having to slave, slave away, and wash dirty pots and pans. I just *hate* washing dishes, don't you? And then there are so many children at home, and everything in a muddle! . . . Of course I love them all, but oh I wish we lived in town, and were rich like lawyer Upton! People are so polite there, and no one ever goes at you as Mrs. Might does. She just seems to take a pleasure in scolding me, because she doesn't like me!"

And so I found that Gay's path, which I had once imagined so rose-strewn, had its thorns, too; to Gay, very sharp thorns indeed.

Mrs. Might's version was somewhat different. "I'm jist heart sorry fer that Mrs. Torrance,

though it *is* her own fault. It's jist drudge, drudge from morn till night, 'n' that Gay sittin' up with her two hands as white as milk, 'n' her blue ribbon 'n' danglin' things, when a check apron 'ud suit her better! . . . I jist thought it my dooty to speak about it—but that Matilda Torrance! Ye might as well talk to a block o' wood when it comes to sparin' herself 'n' takin' anything out of her children—I tried reasonin', but that was no use. 'N' then I said things that 'ud ha' made anyone else either think, or git roarin' mad—but I declare to goodness, Peg, ye couldn't *make* that woman mad, even fer her own good. She didn't mind doin' things, she said, 'n' Gay had never been used to it, 'n' didn't seem suited to housework, somehow. I declare to goodness, it was enough to provoke a saint jist to listen to her, 'n' her jist that fagged. . . . So then I tried Gay, 'n' if the little minx didn't jist turn 'n' flounce upstairs like a cat! . . . However, Peggie, I consider it 's me dooty to train that girl, jist as if her mother was dead 'n' gone, 'n' if she doesn't turn out some use it 'll not be

on *my* conscience. It was never the way o' the Greens to shirk their plain dooty, Peg, I kin tell ye that. 'N' there's one thing sure, if some one doesn't take hold o' that girl 'n' keep her busier than she is, she's goin' to git into mischief sure."

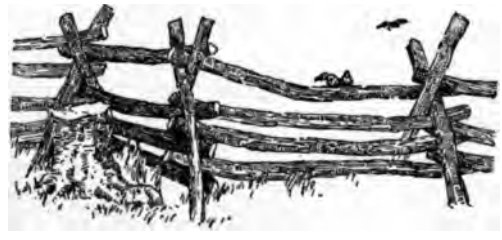
Of the Carmichaels since Dick went away I had seen next to nothing. People said Henry Carmichael had become wonderfully changed, that his bluff jest whenever he met a neighbour on the road was now a thing of the past, and that he had given over his old habits of swearing and spoke and moved in a subdued way, and with a half-sad smile that was very different from the old hearty laugh.

People said, of course, that he was heart-broken over Dick's leaving home, a circumstance over which there was much speculation, and not altogether to Dick's credit, since it seemed incomprehensible that any young fellow who had such prospects, and of whom there was such urgent need, should leave home except from pure heartlessness. His invalid mother should have been enough

to keep him; and nobody would have thought it of Dick Carmichael! . . . But then, some young fellows must see the world. . . . Dick would probably find that a rolling stone is the least likely to gather moss, and would be glad enough to come back to the "old man" in the end.

Some few there were, too, who said that Henry Carmichael and his son must have had words, since Henry Carmichael was the hottest-headed man in Oroway. But these, as a rule, were not listened to. Henry Carmichael almost worshipped the ground that his son walked on, everyone knew that, and if ever they had had words who knew better than Dick Carmichael that it was just on again and off again with his father? Henry Carmichael wasn't the man to hold spite.

For my own part, I had long noticed, in my riding about the farm, that Henry Carmichael no longer shouted at his horses as he used to, and often, day after day I would see him quietly following the plough, or putting up his fences, or stooking his grain, for the most part alone, for he did not seem to want men



about him except on pressing occasions, as when the grain was ripe for the cutting, or the clover ready for the storing.

Just once I met him, and so lonely and sad did he look that, perhaps for Dick's sake, I brought myself to look into his face and bid him a good day.

He was looking at me, and, involuntarily, it seemed, stopped his horse.

"Ye've heard from Dick?" he said.

"No, no!" I answered hurriedly, "Never!"

Then, thinking that, perhaps, he should know, "He has written to Gay Torrance, I believe. He says he is doing well. He is up in the North Shore lumber woods."

He gave the reins an impatient jerk, as though to resent some imputation of unfaithfulness cast upon Dick.

"Yes, yes," he said, "I know all that. Dick writes to us every week. He's a good lad, Dick is. But I thought ye might ha' heard, too. Ye were rare friends when ye were little, Dick 'n' you, scamperin' over them hills, 'n' climbin' over them fences."

I made to go on, but he looked at me again,

as if about to speak, and again, in spite of myself, I stopped.

"It 's queer," he said, "how a fellow likes to talk about Dick!"

To this I knew not what to say, so rode on, and in a moment, looking back, saw him driving slowly on, his head bent, his horse going from right to left as it chose.

For one moment I longed to rush back and talk to him, tell him how sorry for him I felt, because I, too, had been lonely; then the hot blood surged to my face, and I, too, bent my head, and, giving my horse a cut, rode on.

Why, oh why was it that I, to whom the very sight of this man should be an abhorrence, should, at every unguarded moment, feel my heart going out to him, not in pity, nor in such love as the good feel toward sinners, but in genuine liking for himself?

But my watchman was on the tower again, and once more the gulf between me and Henry Carmichael was widening.

The sound of a voice made me start violently.

It was only old Chris who spoke. He was

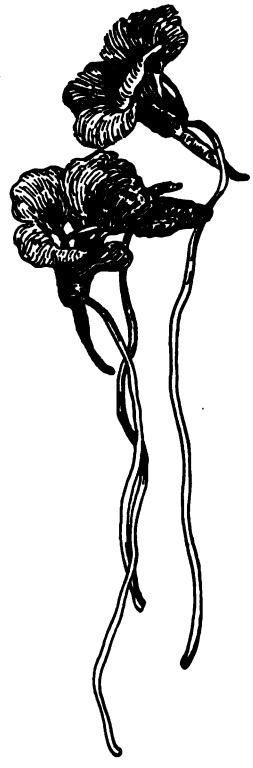
leaning on the fence which he had been repairing, rubbing his chin ruminatingly as he watched Henry Carmichael driving slowly down the road.

"Yon 's a lonely man," he said, "Dash it, what did that son 'o his want to dig out like that fer? I saw ye talkin' with him, Peggie."

"Yes," I said, "he misses Dick very much."

But Chris's thoughts were far from Dick.

"I tell ye, Peggie," he said. "ye' re misjudgin' him as yer father did before ye. 'N' yer mother—my stars, but she 's savage agin' him! Little wonder, mebbe, poor soul, thinkin' as she does about him; 'n' if ever a woman worshipped a man yer mother worshipped yer father. . . . But Peggie, lass, as I 've told ye often before, ye 're all misjudgin' him, every mother's son o' ye. Henry Carmichael no more took that timber than I did, 'n' if he was mistaken about the line fence, why that 's what many a man before him 's been. 'N' as fer what happened after," lowering his voice and taking off his hat as with an involuntary act of respect to the dead, "it may just ha' been only the exertion o' the fire as



the doctor said. It was unfortunate fer Henry Carmichael that he happened to come up just then, but who 's to know that it was the sight of *him* that caused it, as yer mother thinks! . . . 'N' if it was, 'n' sure enough yer father didn't like the looks o' Carmichael, yet, Peggie—with no disrespect to the dead I say it, fer it 'll be long before I 'll find another man to think as much of as yer father—yet, Peggie, the longer I live the surer I feel that we jist oughtn't to jump at our own notions o' people, 'n' think there 's no good in them if they don't jist walk in the way we 've set out. . . . People 's not alike, Peggie. They 're as different as posies in a garden, 'n' it 'ud be a queer tiresome world if it wasn't that way. 'N' no matter what folks looks like to us, mebbe it 'ud be wiser fer us not to believe anything bad o' them that we hevn't jist proved to be so. It's usually a good thing Peggie, to jist stop 'n' prove yer sum before ye set down the answer fer good 'n' all."

I said nothing, for I was mournfully thinking that Chris's logic should work both ways, and that, in his charity, the dear old man had

set down his answer in regard to Henry Carmichael without proving it. What would he have had to say, I wondered, if he knew all, if he, too, had seen the momentary vision of that dark figure in the lightning flash.

Some of my incredulity must have crept into my face, for in a moment he resumed.

"Aye, ye think I 'm jist a dotin' old man, with notions, Peggie; 'n' ye see faults, mebbe, in Carmichael that my blind old eyes can't follow. Well, well, if it's so, lass, ye 'll remember that we 're all weak 'n' all in enough need o' pardon. Aye, it's a queer world this, 'n' often it seems a sore kind of a mix up. But as ye get older things seem to straighten out somehow, 'n' bother ye less. I 'm thinkin' when the Great Day comes there 'll be jist a big straightenin' out, 'n' mebbe some of us 'll be kind o' surprised. It 'll be a grand sight to me, Peggie, to see yer father 'n' Carmichael shakin' hands."

In spite of myself Chris's confidence impressed me somewhat. Could he be right? And yet—no, no, Chris did not know all.

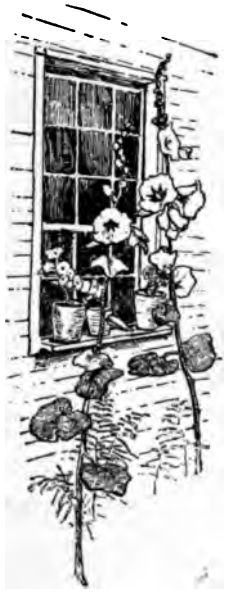
Once, just once, as I rode on, did an impulse

come to me to ride straight to Henry Carmichael and tell him all, ask him fairly about his visit to our house on that eventful night. Then, again, the feeling that my doing so might somehow make things even worse for Dick, sealed my lips, and putting my whip to the horse again, I rode swiftly home.

CHAPTER XIV

A NEW POWER AT THE CENTRE

OROWAY Centre was becoming quite a pretentious place in those days. It is not necessary to tell perhaps, how, like that famous "Atri in Abruzzo" it had managed to climb half up the hill, nor to explain how our ambitions that it should become one day a town were nipped in the bud. Suffice it to say that beside the church there grew up in time a store with a post-office combined, in which the shop man took turns in dealing out mail and groceries, and gave you your letters with thumb-marks of butter on them and a redolence of cheese which accompanied you all the way home and perfumed your letter drawer for a month; that, in time, too, the school-house was removed to the "Centre"; that a smithy also found it profitable to be there, and divided popularity with the church step as a loitering place for the loafers; that,





following all these indications of civilisation, a dwelling-house or two sprang up, and developed window-boxes along their front windows in a vain attempt to be town-like; that, last of all, in one of these dwelling-houses an "office" was established, and a sign pretentiously hung out, "J. Hudson Jamieson, M. D." In those days it was just becoming an ear-mark of social preëminence to write one's initial first.

Hud Jamieson, to be explicit, after graduating, and spending two years in the "States" somewhere, had returned to Oroway Centre, and hoped to build up a lucrative practice there. Our last doctor, it is true, old Dr. Moffat, who had taken a house about a mile from the Centre for a term of five years and had made quite a prominent figure for a time, as he drove about with his white hair flying over his collar and a brace of dogs at his buggy wheels, had left us three years before his lease was out. "The devil couldn't make a living about Oroway Centre," he said. "No one ever got sick there." But then, Dr. Moffat was old, and, in houses where there

were marriageable daughters there was no especial reason for having him called in if Teddie had the measles, or Johnny the chicken-pox. Dr. Jamieson stood a much better chance of having opportunity for displaying his medical skill; and, indeed, after he came it seemed that there was a regular epidemic of threatening symptoms. If Teddie had the measles he was sure to be verging on scarlet fever; if Johnny had the chicken-pox there was certainly a complication with some unpronounceable name, in connection with it. Our usual period of fall lassitude, also, developed alarming possibilities, after Dr. Jamieson had examined the water from a dozen wells, and found typhoid germs in the whole of them.

Having such opportunities for establishing the intimate relations of family physician among the families of so large a district, and being, beside, a young man of unusually pleasing appearance and manners, it was only to be expected that Dr. Jamieson should speedily become a general favourite throughout Oroway, and that, while the older ladies regarded him with admiring glances and an

aside, "Who'd ha' thought it of old Jim Jamieson's son!" the younger ones fell into the habit of donning an extra ribbon, on occasion, and a certain coyness which, however, was perhaps quite involuntary, and liable to crop up anywhere and everywhere on the appearance of the young doctor.

As for Dr. Jamieson himself, he accepted all invitations out to tea with a most flattering alacrity, coupled suggestively with a proviso that if he were not on "an important case," and so generally did he distribute his favours that he gave little cause for offence indeed. If he showed any partiality for Gay Torrance, it was so very slight a partiality as to serve only to make things interesting, and then didn't everyone know that Gay Torrance was always throwing herself at his head? How, indeed, could he get out of walking home with her from meeting, without being rude, or talking to her in the post-office by the half-hour—when she deliberately put herself in his way? He was a gentleman, Dr. Jamieson was, but Gay Torrance needn't think he didn't see through her tricks.

Only Amanda Might failed to join in the general adulation.

"It was enough to make ye sick," she said, after the East Line picnic, "to see the wimmen 'n' girls hoverin' around him like flies over a honey-pot; 'n' 'Dr. Jamieson,' here, 'n' 'Dr. Jamieson' there; 'n' all the best cakes 'n' pies stuck in front of him like as if he was my Lord Guv'nor General; 'n' this one runnin' with tea 'n' that one with coffee! I declare to goodness, Peggie, if I didn't ketch that big Mrs. Black off the Back Line handin' him my pineapple 'n' strawberry tart, 'n' tellin' him he really must have a piece o' that because her Letty Ann made it! So I jist up 'n' says, 'I guess you're mistaken, Mrs. Black. That's my tart that I baked special fer Adam Might, 'n' on his table it goes! So ye'd better hunt up your Letty Ann's tart fer the doctor. I'm sure he'd rather hev' hers than this?' 'N' so I walked off with the tart in the middle of her explanations, 'n' set it afore Adam Might 'n' poor old Bill Peters that never gits his teeth on anything good unless it's at a free picnic. I'll bet ye she didn't bring Letty Ann's tart.

I saw it—not a grain o' pineapple in it, 'n' paste as yellow as *that!*"

"Were you talking to the doctor!" I asked, willing to keep her going.

"Onst. I said to him, sez, I, 'Fer goodness sake, Hud Jamieson, git a pitcher 'n' help them boys carry tea!' But never a hitch did my Lord Strut give, but sit there smilin' with the girls around him. I do like to see a man, Peggie, that gits on with men. If ye see a man that men likes, Peggie, ye may be sure that if ever ye marry him he'll not come pokin' his nose into the dishwater, 'n' wantin' to know how much ye paid fer yer garters. But beware o' that kind that's never satisfied unless they're danglin' at a girl's apron string. . . . He"—coming back to the doctor—"he hesn't been around after *you* yet, Peggie?"

"Oh, no," I laughed. "My attractions have been quite insufficient as a magnet so far."

"I don't know," said Mrs. Might with the best of intentions but her usual tact, looking round upon the broad fields where the sleek cattle and fat sheep were browsing contentedly, "ye're pretty well set up, Peggie,

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innocence, of my, "prospects." . . . "Oh yes, doctor, Peggie 'll be well set up if I do say it, 'n' she deserves to be, if ever a girl did. I used to think I 'd like to hev' a boy, but now I think it 's all been for the best. If there 'd been boys I suppose it 'ud ha' been the same as over at Jim Hall's there, the boys git everything 'n' the girls nothing at all. What Maria Hall 'll do, thirty-five this summer 'n' not likely to git a man, is more than I can see; fer she 's not the girl 'll stay there when another woman comes into the house, 'n' young Jim, they say, is to be married this fall. Not of course that Peggie 'd ha' been like her, fer, as I alwus said, Maria Hall was an old maid from the day she was born; but it hurts no girl, doctor, to hev' a bit in her own right, 'n' when she marries it never comes amiss providin' she gits a man that won't waste. I daresay, now, there isn't a prettier farm than this in Oroway nor a more payin; 'n' I 'm right glad fer Peggie to have it."

My mother, indeed, as much as any woman in Oroway, was delighted with the new doctor, whose bright talk, and adroit flatteries had

recommended themselves to her immediately. Moreover, was it not something to have the prospect of possessing for a son-in-law a young doctor?

It is a mark of the simple mind to take things and people as they appear, and only to the worldly wise, or to him of the super-ordinary vision, is it given to readily discern between the tinsel and the gold, and to behold all men, bereft of rank, station, wealth, and the glitter of accoutrement as "Forked, straddling animals with bandy legs" (Carlyle). In our little world a professional air, white hands, faultless clothes, and the reputation of having a good "practice," represented the height of rank, station, wealth, and the glitter of accoutrement. And so my mother, dear heart, in her anxiety for my well-being, imagined that she was gently feathering my nest for me; and if the down was allured by a bit of a bribe, why, she did not see that it should be any the less soft because of that. . . . I doubt not that there were many mothers in Oroway who would have given much for possession of her bribe.

Nevertheless, when Dr. Jamieson's proposal came, it came as a surprise. Of that chapter of my life I shall tell few details, for to me that was a dry, pithless love-making, and when at sunset of a beautiful October day, leaning over the bars at the end of the wood-lane, Dr. Jamieson took my hands, and vowed his eternal love for me, I was no more moved, nor so much, as I should have been if my little dog Jap, the last of a line of Japs, had licked my fingers.

It seemed so far-off and artificial, that flowery speech of the young doctor's, and with an amused curiosity I let him speak through to the end; then I told him how very useless his declaration had been, and we parted, I knowing right well that his heart was not broken.

How differently, I thought, as I walked slowly homeward over the rustling leaves, should I have felt had it been possible that Dick, whose one touch had been sufficient to send me into a three months' fever—but then, what right had I to think of Dick? He had been writing to Gay Torrance more frequently,



of late, and she told me that he had asked for me—once.

Yes, why should he not care for Gay, beautiful, light-hearted Gay? Well—he should never know—never, never! And so I turned aside and wandered on in the golden shower of the leaves, and walked and walked until the dull pain at my heart gave way to a resigned melancholy.

Yes, I should be an old maid like Maria Hall, but I should, after all, have much more to interest me, and I should be thankful. If only my mother could live on and on, and dear old Chris, and Miss Tring! . . . Oh dear, why should we ever be so much younger than those we loved? . . . But then, what was the use of looking into the future? Perhaps I should go first. If I did I should want to be buried in these dear forest aisles, with the squirrels skipping over my head, and the music of the wind in the trees above me forever.

It was just such a fit of melancholy as comes to us all, sometimes on little provocation, and at which we may laugh in an hour's

time; but just then it was a very real melancholy to me, and one little likely to be exorcised by the solemn comments of old Chris whom, also in pensive mood that evening, I found sitting out among the pumpkins which he had gathered round the cellar door all ready for the storing.

"Comin' back alone, Peggie?" he said.

"Didn't you expect to see me coming back alone?" I asked, forcing a laugh.

He nodded quite seriously, then went on, "A-well, a-well, there's some girls as seems created jist fer the business o' huntin' men, 'n' others as seems set apart somehow. But dash it, Peggy, it's not the worst o' the wimmen often goes along the narrow road where there's no room fer two."



I sat down beside him—dear old Chris—how I can see him yet, among his yellow pumpkins, with his kind old eyes looking upon me, and the yellow sunset shining on the warm brown of his dear old face!

"Nor the worst of the men, Chris," I returned, smilingly, paying back the compliment. But he paid no heed, for he was looking now

out to the west, and rubbing his chin with the old gesture which meant that he had something to say.

"A-well, a-well," he went on presently. "this world's a queer mix-up; but it's wonderful how things straightens out somehow. 'N' as we git on the last slope, goin' down grade, easy like, but sure, it's wonderful how peaceful things is. The older ye git the less things bothers ye, 'n' that's a great comfort. It 's jist as if, when we're young, we keep steppin' up 'n' up, tryin' to step over stone-walls, 'n' when we git old we find they've been jist a few pebbles lyin' in the road all the time. I'm thinkin' after all, there's fewer prizes in life than youth believes, Peggie, 'n' when ye all git down to the last level, girl, with the big river flowin' along quiet 'n' easy like, 'n' mebbe a bit o' the sun from the other side glintin' on it, we'll find that the good straight life, 'n' the bein' fair to others, 'n' brave in the face o' things, 'n' hopeful, is about all there's been much worth while."

Chris's words soothed me, as they always did, and yet it did seem to me that I was

young to be thinking of the big river, and being buried out there in the wood. It could hardly be, surely, that I had squeezed out the last drop of the wine of life, and that now there should be nothing new, nothing more than to settle down on the long slope, longer for me than for most others.

That night I had a long talk with Miss Tring, and, as usual, she took hold of me.

"My dear," she said, "it 's change you need; change of work, or interest, or something, something to take you out of yourself for a while. Now, I'm afraid you've got too well to the bottom of this farming. We'll have to look up something new in connection with it, or send you away for a little while."

So I went asleep invigorated. Something must happen. If it did not we must make it.

Did I have a consciousness that there was already a something rapidly taking form to itself in the near future, and waiting just for me?

Perhaps not. Yet is not life often bearable because, as we loose grasp of one hope, we at once grasp at another?

My hope was indefinable as yet, yet was it there, a living reality. "Look for something bright," Miss Tring had said. "Believe that the best is somehow, sometime, for you, and that there is always something worth living for if you keep brave and work on."

And with the new day I looked again for something bright and, presently, found enough to do to keep me fully engaged until it came.

CHAPTER XV

AN EXCITEMENT AT THE CENTRE

THE first diversion, although not at all a pleasant one, came of Gay Torrance. I think I have mentioned that her preference for the young doctor was the neighbourhood talk, although why Gay Torrance should be set upon more than any of the others who fished in the stream, might have been a question, unless, indeed, it was because of her pretty face. Only a homely woman, as a rule, receives credit for all her virtues at the hands, or tongues, rather, of her own sex.

I myself had met Gay walking with the doctor on several occasions, and had come upon them once by the roadside, Gay sitting upon the low fence wreathing ropes of the woolly, wild clematis about her, and putting clusters of ripe, scarlet haws in her hair, while the doctor stood looking at her with open admiration in his eyes; and I had wondered

if he could have looked upon a fairer picture. But then, to me, strangely, perhaps, the young doctor was as no one at all, and I could afford to see Gay's beauties just then. Had it been Dick, perhaps—but then, why think of Dick? What was it to me, either, if she chose to play fast and loose between him and this gay young gallant? And yet poor Dick had had so much to worry him! Surely Gay, too, would not stab him! Yet, would it not be a mercy if she did before it was too late. She was not worthy of him—she—— But pshaw, was I becoming as ungenerous as the rest? Why think of Dick? And winsome, winsome Gay, surely any man could be happy with her; and, after all, it was not companions men wanted in wives, but playthings, to look at, and pet, and be proud of! Surely even Dick might be proud of Gay!

Yet, excusing her faults as I would, *seeing* her faults as I did, even I was dumbfounded at the dance that the little lady presently led us, and ready to believe at last that there had been some foundation in it when Amanda Might said: "That Gay Torrance 'll need

to keep busier nor she is or she 'll get into mischief."

Yet poor Gay!—Looking back on it all now, I am sure she drifted into it as the moth drifts into the candle; and when we saw her afterward, with her poor singed wings, I am sure that those of us who knew her best were, at least, ready to pity her.

I remember it as though it had been yesterday, that day in which so much seemed to happen, and which left us all in a turmoil; just how crisp and cold the air felt; and how the little Clearing looked with the first snow upon the cornstalks like dust which had fallen in the night, and the brown earth showing through everywhere; and how we wondered when old Yorkie Dodd came driving in very slowly, almost at daybreak, with some one or something huddled beside him on the seat of the democrat.

"Gracious sakes' alive!" said my mother, drawing back the curtains to see, "what on earth's Yorkie Dodd comin' in this time o' day fer? 'N' who on earth's he got with him?"

And so we peered, while the stout brown horses came nearer and nearer, leaving a long black mark where the snow stuck to their feet and the wheels of the democrat. When at last Yorkie's face could be clearly seen it looked solemn enough, set straight ahead, and never once turned toward the figure all covered over with a brown shawl, that crouched at his side.

And then, just in front of the window, the head of the bundle was raised, and the shawl fell back, and we saw two sad dark eyes, and a pale, pale face that was strange to us, turn with a keen, hunted look toward us.

"Mercy onto us!" exclaimed my mother, dropping the curtain, "Who can it be? and she seems to hev' a baby too. Run, Peggie, 'n' bring the poor thing in, whoever she is." So I went out, and the strange young creature handed me down the little one, which was maybe two years old, with a sort of sob.

When I had taken the woman and the child to the door I went back to Yorkie, who had been winking and blinking at me significantly.

"Who is she, Yorkie?" I said.

"Blest if I know!—but she says she 's the wife o' the young doctor."

"Wha—at?"

"That 's what she says, sure enough—that she 's the wife o' Doctor Jamieson. Says she tracked him from somewhere in the States. Poor soul, she looks as if she 'd been trackin' long enough."

"But Yorkie, it can't be true! Where did *you* pick her up?"

"At Saintsbury, three o'clock this mornin.' Me 'n' Jim Hall was there shippin' cattle, druv' the two bunches in the night, 'n' we 'd jist got them into the car when in came the west-bound express 'n' off got this poor young craythur, askin' when the next train left fer Oroway Centre.

" 'Why,' says the station man, 'there 's no train goes to Oroway Centre.'

" 'No train,' says she, dazed like.

" 'No train,' says he, ''n' no way to git there only by livery.'

" 'How much will it cost?' says she, kind o' sinkin' like.

" 'Two dollars,' says he, 'n' with that she sunk all in a little heap like, 'n' that forlorn lookin'.

" 'How fur is it to walk?' says she.

" 'Good fifteen mile,' says he, 'more 'n' you can do with that baby to carry. Who 's yer folks?' says he, 'Didn't nobody come to meet ye.'

" 'I hev no folks?' says she, kind o' proud like, 'only my husband, Doctor Jamieson, 'n' he didn't know I was comin' to-night.'

"With that the station man stared, 'n' give a low whistle—'peared he knew Doctor Jamieson—then he kind o' laughed, 'n' said she 'd better go to a hotel 'n' send fur the doctor if she hedn't money to git to him.

"That laugh was enough fer me, 'n' so I went up 'n' told her she might come along with me. I didn't ask her no questions, but I knew she 'd had somethin' to do with the doctor 'n' wanted to git to him bad, 'n' that was enough fer me."

"And she said no more?" I asked.

"Not much, jist kep' fondlin' the baby, 'n'

callin' it pet names, 'n' tryin'to keep it warm. 'N' I ast her no questions. When we got near home the baby began cryin'. 'Is there a hotel,' says she, 'where I kin go 'n' git the baby asleep before I go to his father?' 'No, there isn't no hotel,' says I, 'but I know a house where ye 'll be well used, 'n' git yer baby warmed,' says I, 'if I know it,' 'n' so I brung her here. I hope it wasn't bein' too presumptyus."

"No, no," said I. "You know mother's heart for babies."

With that I went in all in a maze, and found my mother with the little one on her knee in front of the stove, and her whole face lighted up and beautiful as it ever became over little helpless things.

The woman who called herself Doctor Jamieson's wife was in our biggest armchair, close by the stove, too, spreading out her fingers to the warmth, and watching the baby as though she couldn't take her eyes from it. Miss Tring brought her some hot tea, and some toast left from our breakfast, and she drank and ate greedily as though famished. She

seemed very young, and it was not hard to see that she had been very, very pretty; but when she spoke it was in a voice that did not suit her pretty face, and with an accent that might have belonged to one of the dining-room maids in a Saintsbury Hotel.

"Oh," she said, presently, "I don't think I kin walk about any more to-day. Could you," to my mother, "send word to Doctor Jamieson that there 's a lady here wants to see him? Don't mention any name. I want to give him a surprise," with a sorrowful attempt at deceiving us. "Jist say that a lady here wants to see him."

"Of course we'll send him word," said my mother, sympathetically. "Yer husband hes a right to come to ye. Peggie, run 'n' send word with Yorkie now. It 'll not take him much out of his way."

I ran after Yorkie, and caught up to him just as he was going out of the wood lane.

"I 'll tell him," he said, scratching his head. "But if Jim Hall 's got back afore I git there I'm afraid the doctor 'll hev' the whole story. Jim Hall 's a grand hand to spread news, 'n'

this 'll be as good as nuts to him. I'm thinkin' it 'll not be as sweet to the young doctor. There's somethin' in it that's not good, though. I'd never ha' thought it o' Doctor Jamieson. Well, I'll go on as fast as I ken. Go on, Jen! Go on, Jerry!" and he rattled off into the open country.

When I came to the house I found the stranger on a bed, with the baby beside her laughing and prattling a few baby words. The mother seemed to be completely exhausted, but for all that she had become nervous, too, and she was all in a tremble, with her eyes burning like coals.

"How long 'll it take him to git here?" she said.

"Oh, he can't be here short of an hour," said my mother, "so jist try 'n' go asleep."

"Yes, yes," she said, "I must try 'n' git a quiet sleep somehow, fer I've a good deal to say to him. It's quite a while since I seen him last."

"Now, shut yer eyes," said my mother, spreading a cover over her. "I'll tell ye when he comes, 'n' I'll keep the baby. Bless its

little heart, it'll be jist as happy as if its mother hed it, and I'll git it a nice cooky," holding her hand out to it.

For a moment the mother strained it to her, then, when it laughed and reached out its hands toward my mother, she handed it over without another word, and we went out and closed the door.

"Well," said my mother decidedly, as we sat down by the stove, with the dishes unwashed on the table, and the floor all unswept, "well, I alwus thought a heap o' Doctor Jamieson, but if there's truth spoke under heaven, that girl's spoke it to-day."

"You think she's Doctor Jamieson's wife?" I said, still incredulously.

"As sure as I was Robert Mallory's!" and Miss Tring added, "Yes, I think she spoke the truth."

"'N' if he doesn't do his dooty by her and this poor lambie," went on my mother, fondling the baby, "it'll not be for want o' *me* tellin' him what his dooty is! Fer if ever I told a livin' soul his dooty I'll tell it to Hudson Jamieson this day. Not that I



ever was used to tellin' it to Robert Mallory, or needed to—but dear, dear, what men some girls gits! . . . Peggie Mallory,"—looking at me straight.

"Yes, mother."

" 'Twas a work o' Divine Providence that ye didn't git caught! Not but what Doctor Jamieson wasn't keen enough to marry ye—'n' him with another wife all the time! Oh, dear, dear!"

"Where did she come from?"

"From the other side, away beyond—oh dear, hundreds 'n' hundreds o' miles—tracked him all the way like a detective! 'N' he lived with her jist six months, 'n' went off without a by yer leave! Oh, dear, dear!" . . . Never had I seen my little mother more flustered.

All morning we waited the doctor's visit, unable to settle ourselves to our work, or do anything much but peep out of the window and watch the little one toddling about the floor, and drawing himself up by chairs. And when, at last, old Yorkie Dodd came rattling in from the wood-lane alone, our hearts sank.

My mother met him half way up the path, and came back to the house walking behind the democrat.

"Too late!" she said to us, as Miss Tring and I stood waiting at the door. "Jim Hall had been and told the whole story, 'n' the doctor had driven off. Someone had seen him go toward Torrance's, 'n' Mr. Dodd went there, but Mrs. Torrance said he hadn't been there."

"Did you see Gay?" I asked.

"Yes," said Yorkie, "she was sittin' by the window, but she never said nothin'!"

"Did the Torrances know?"

"Oh yes; Mrs. Torrance looked as if she'd been cryin', 'n' Dave was stormin' about at the barn what he'd do if the scoundrel ever dared set foot there again."

It was hard to know how to tell the poor creature in the bedroom that the doctor could not be found; but Miss Tring managed it somehow, and managed, too, to keep up her hope, for Jim Hall had taken it in hand to find the doctor, and had sent messengers to watch the trains at Saintsbury.

But as the day wore on, and still there was no word, the poor girl became very restless, and began tossing her arms as though in a fever. Indeed, we began to fear very much that she was on the verge of a serious illness; and what should we do, since now, and, indeed, because of her, there was no accessible doctor nearer than Saintsbury?

There was, to be sure, one at Ildering, but the round of ten miles about the cliffs, over the very worst roads imaginable, was much less practicable than the fifteen miles to Saintsbury, and, as a rule, at this time of the year, no one ever thought of going by the river. The trip down might possibly be accomplished, but few, especially in cold weather, would be likely to face the return trip.

As evening came on, however, our patient seemed so much worse that we resolved that something must be done, and I determined to run down and have a look at the river, anyway. The fall rains had not been very heavy, and, if the river were not too much swollen, it would be no great task for one of our neighbour boys to run down the stream,

not impede my way
set off among the fan
have treaded with ce
of night.

A brisk walk of ha
through a thicket whe
a hedge, impenetrable
the leafy bowers of M
river. It was flowin
and in good volume;
worse at this season, a
up it would be but a p
or Tom Billings.

As I turned to go
something bright am
overhung the stream
looked, strained my
darkness, then detern

A few minutes hard

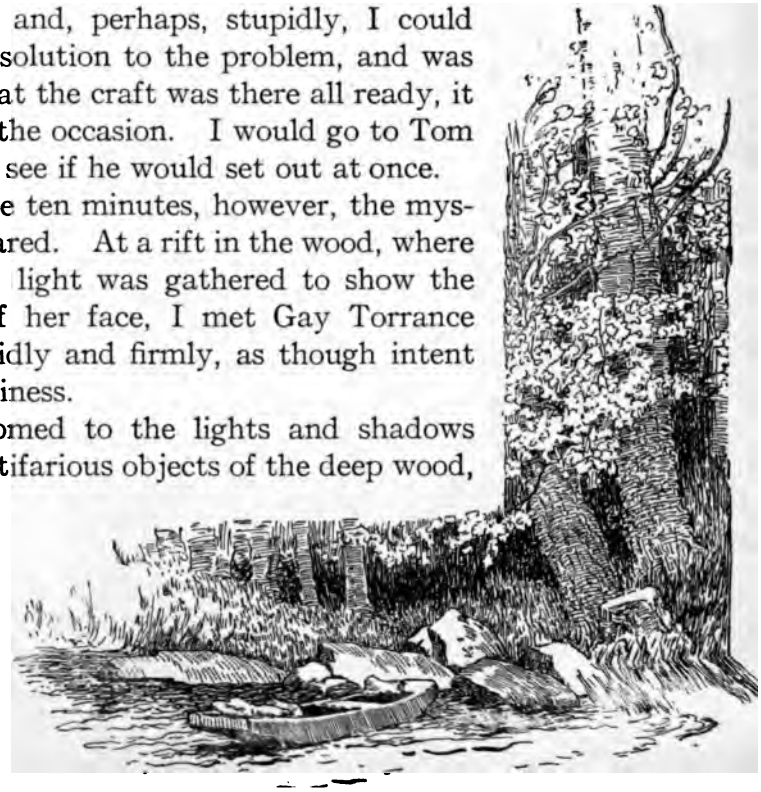
thicket, whose sharp twigs would persist in hitting me in the face, brought me to the spot, and I was astonished to find Tom Billings's new punt lying there, bobbing up and down on the water under the willows, and all supplied with cushions and a rug.

How came it there? Above all things, why should two cushions and a rug be in Tom Billings's boat, all as though tricked out for some fair lady, when big, awkward Tom Billings, with his shock head and watery eyes, would run, almost, at the sight of a girl?

Mystified, and, perhaps, stupidly, I could think of no solution to the problem, and was only glad that the craft was there all ready, it seemed, for the occasion. I would go to Tom Billings and see if he would set out at once.

After some ten minutes, however, the mystery was cleared. At a rift in the wood, where just enough light was gathered to show the whiteness of her face, I met Gay Torrance walking rapidly and firmly, as though intent on some business.

Unaccustomed to the lights and shadows and the multifarious objects of the deep wood,



she did not at first see me, especiall
stopped still in astonishment, and migl
well have passed in the gloom and n
gray raincoat for one of the weather
trunks that stood round about, but
staring ahead, as though thinking on
matters.

In an instant the meaning of it all
upon me, and I stepped before her.

"Gay," I said, hoping not to start
but she started back with a low cry, as
I had been some uncouth monster, su
appeared from the wood.

"Gay," I said, "where are you going

That brought her to herself, and she
on me like an animal brought to bay.

"What business is it of yours," sh
"where I am going? You are good
at walking in the woods yourself!"

"And for that very reason," I sa
there no marvel for my being here
you, Gay, you never walk in the
alone."

By this time her eyes had shifted, b
still held her head very erectly.

"Peggie," she said, "I am on an affair of my own. It isn't like you to pry into people's doings, and I am sure you 'll not into mine when I tell you that I am just on a bit of private business which will not wait. Now, I must be going."

There was only one thing to be done.

"Gay," I said, stepping close to her, and putting my hand on her arm, "you are going to the river to run away with Dr. Jamieson. Oh, Gay, Gay, you don't know what you are doing!"

As I spoke she cringed farther and farther from me, but her face, turned toward me, was full of desperate anger.

"Yes," she said, "you have spied it all out well! I am going to run away with Dr. Jamieson, but what is that to you? You are nothing to me, nor I to you. Go home to your farm, where everyone is under your thumb, and leave me to rise or fall as I choose!"

She made as if to go on; but I tightened my hold on her.

"Gay," I said, "in this, I am afraid, I am my brother's keeper. Oh, Gay, after all that

"I will not let you
"You must come bacl
to your mother. Gay
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She stood looking a
ment, then, to my s
round.

"Come," she said, l
through the wood.

Not a word was
emerged from the thi
end of the wood-lane.

"Now," she said,
farther, Peggie, it is li
shall not be afraid.

But I was suspicious

"I will go home with you, Gay!" I said; and there must have been that in my voice which proclaimed an unalterable decision, for she stopped and faced me, with all the pent-up anger flaming again.

"Yes," she said, "you know it all. You know I will never go home. That I will go back through the wood as soon as I am rid of you. Oh, you are very crafty! You will keep me—us—late for the Ildering train, will you? I tell you, Peg Mallory, you may keep me a day, or a week, or a month, but it will be all the same in the end, for I will go to him, and nobody can hinder me! So you may as well let me go now, and save a second scene."

"But your mother!"

"My mother hasn't to live my life, and"—with a little sob—"my life is worth nothing without him. . . . I tell you I will go to him, and you must let me go!"—stamping her foot on the ground—"How dare you put between us, you who never had a lover in your life, and, with your face, never likely to!"

She had begun in a frenzy, and was scarcely

means to have your
someone who—who l
his arms around you,
oh, I can't tell you h
anyone but you, and
so tenderly forever!
know what it is to hat
home, the work, and
quarrelling, and the
nothing to hope for u
Oh Peggie, if you kne
understand, you woul
would let me go! P
go back to it! And
said she did, and l
me!"

Poor child, poor chi
my arms, my tears n

tation might be hers? Had not my own mental struggles shown me wherein human nature might be weak enough, and what almost superhuman strength—such strength as Gay Torrance did not possess—it might take to steer one safely through such a perilous way as that through which she was now passing. For once I was thankful for my temptations, my struggles, since these, and these alone, had made me one with this poor child, capable of feeling for her, with her, as one untried could not have done. It is an easy matter to pronounce upon any situation in which one has not been tried, but the practice is not one well fitted to the development of tenderness or charity.

Yet, whatever might come, Gay Torrance must not be permitted to reach Ildering with Hudson Jamieson this night.

But one course remained untried, and I shrank from the humiliation it must bring her; yet her faith in Hud Jamieson must be shattered, or all would be yet undone.

"Gay, he isn't worthy of you," I began, drawing her very close to me, but she would

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could, I told of how H
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asked me to marry hi

As I spoke she be
Then, when I had finis
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"I ask your pardo
"May Heaven have m

And then she sank in a little shivering heap on the edge of the snow-rimmed road.

I tried to lift her, but could not, so I sat beside her, chafing her hands until she should have recovered somewhat.

"Now my dear, my dear," I said. "You must try to go home. They will be missing you, and——"

"Oh, Peggie," she faltered, clinging to me, "I can't go home! I can't! . . . I didn't want mother to be afraid of anything happening me—anything worse, I mean—for I thought she 'd be glad I was to marry Hudson, she was so fond of him. And I left a note for Toddy to give her after seven, and—and I lied in it, Peggie. I said before they could catch us we 'd be at Saintsbury with the doctor's fast horse, and off on the train to Barnsbro' where we were to be married. Instead of that we were to take the train at Ildering and be married in Oldswood. I—I thought they 'd never think of the river and —and—I thought they 'd believe me, and father'd go to Saintsbury. It was very wrong. Oh, Peggie, I can't go home, they 'll

I knew Dave Torranc
who are hard to arouse t
or indignation against ;
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lame little plan I realise
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If only she hadn't left th
note with Toddy—but si

"You must come hom
said,

But she clung to me lik

"No, no," she said, sh
where that woman is!
Peggie! Don't ask me tc

"But we must go son
can't sit here all night."

"Mightn't I

Peggie? Nobody would know, and to-morrow, maybe, I could go off through the woods, and get away where no one knows me. If I could only go to-night, Peggie, but oh, Peggie, I 'm so afraid of the dark!"

Poor child, poor child! Already her retribution lay heavy upon her, and what could I say but hold her closer to me, with her face cuddled into my cheek, and her arms about my neck! Yet something must be done, and done quickly, for the night was setting in bitterly raw and cold. Already my own fingers were tingling, and Gay's face and hands were like ice. Besides, the doctor had not yet been sent for Mrs. Jamieson, and my long absence might be causing anxiety at home.

Plan after plan went tumbling about in my mind, each only to be discarded ere it had well taken form; and among them all only Amanda Might's face arose, strong, steady, and practical.

"No, Gay," I expostulated, "things aren't so bad as that. You can't stay in the barn . . . Gay——"

"Yes?"

"Will you come with me to Mrs. Might's? She really has the kindest heart in spite of——"

"No, no, she doesn't like me, Peggie! She never did! She was always hard with me, and now she will be ten times worse."

"But when people are in trouble——"

"No, no! She'll not care for me. Not there, Peggie! Oh,"—with a low moan—"if only I had fallen into the river! Would it be so very wicked, Peggie—when to live is so much harder than to die?" and the icy face was turned upward to me, white as a snow-flake in the gathering darkness.

"Gay Torrance," I said, "you are magnifying everything foolishly. After all, as things turned out there's no great harm done and you mustn't even think of so dreadful a thing! Gay, take my advice for once and come with me to Mrs. Might's. There's one thing about her, she knows how to keep her mouth shut. And I can go in and tell your mother you're all right. To-morrow, perhaps, we can fix things up so you'll not be the talk of the neighbourhood. Anyway, we

can't sit here. You are nearly frozen, and so am I."

She sat up suddenly, then rose to her feet, perhaps because the rattle of an approaching wagon was sounding nearer.

"Come," she said, and set off down the road with a sort of despairing doggedness, just clinging to my arm with one little cold hand, so cold that I could feel the iciness of it through my sleeve.

"But I must let them know at home," I said.

She put her hand to her head in a dazed way, and clung to me, shivering again, as though she could never let go of me.

"Perhaps," she said, "you can send word back with whoever is in the wagon."

And so we walked on slowly, until the wagon came up with Tom Billings in it, and I was able to send my message home.

After that, on again silently, Gay now hurrying me on feverishly, with the stars coming out thick and bright above us, and oh, so coldly. Just once she spoke, looking up at them.



"I wish there were no stars to-night," she said. "They seem like eyes."

As we neared the end of our journey she spoke again, nestling as close to me as she could, and still walking so rapidly.

"Do you think he is waiting for me by the river yet?"

"No. He would not miss the train from Ildering even for you, Gay. A coward once is likely to be a coward always. I think he has already gone down the river."

At Adam Might's gate, when we could see the lamplight shining out, clear and steady from the window, she hesitated, and, for an instant, seemed as if she must turn and fly; then again she straightened up, and herself undid the latch.

"Come, you are very cold," she said, "and you have to let mother know yet."

Mrs. Might opened the door for us.

"My stars alive! Is it you, girls!" she exclaimed. "It 's good of you to think o' comin' in to sit a while with an old woman. It 's glad I am to see you, fer Adam Might went to Saintsbury this mornin', 'n' isn't back

yet. My goodness, Gay, ye look nearly froze! . . . Hes—nothin' 's happened, hes it?" stopping suddenly and staring at her.

I pushed Gay into a chair by the stove, and drew Mrs. Might out through the doorway.

"Be good to Gay," I said, "better than you ever were in your life, and don't ask any questions. I'll tell you when I come back. Now, I'm going on to Torrance's."

She stared at me in mute wonder, and I left her still staring, as I set off as fast as I could run.

At the Torrance's, with the barking of the dogs, the door flew open, and a half dozen heads instantly appeared, as little boys and girls ran out like ants.

Mrs. Torrance was also at the door. I could see that she had been crying, though she tried to look as though nothing had happened.

"Oh," she said, with disappointment in every tone. "Is it *you*, Peggie? I though mebbe 'twas Dave 'n' Gay home from Saintsbury."

"Mrs Torrance," I said, "may I speak with you alone?"

She gave me a quick, sharp look, then,

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proud, Dave is; but if he gits desp'rate there's no knowin' who he'll tell or what he'll do; 'n' he was near enough desp'rate, dear knows! If he could only be let know quiet"—so she rambled on, too much excited to think of anything save of screening Gay, and too little accustomed to the direction of affairs to be able to offer a single definite suggestion.

"Isn't Choddy here?" I asked, thinking that the stout lad of fifteen might be well able to take a message to Saintsbury. "Couldn't he go on horseback?"

"Why, now, yes," she said, "I never thought o' that. He's not used to ridin' after dark, but he knows the road to Saintsbury, 'n' the skiff o' snow makes it a little light. . . . Choddy dear," going to the door, "Gay's home, over at Mrs. Might's. Git Jerry out o' the stable 'n' find yer father. Quite like ye'll meet him. Tell him Gay's home, jist; 'n' be sure 'n' put on yer overcoat."

"Huh! Gay over again!" scoffed Choddy, who had evidently been his mother's confidant, "Makin' a racket fer nothin'! If she'd given *me* that note, instead o' that softy of a

Toddy, *I'd* have smelled a rat, I bet ye, 'n' all this fuss 'ud been saved!"

"You would, eh?" growled Toddy, "Yes, you'd ha' been a sneak 'n' looked in!"

"Wouldn't neither! You better shut up!" retorted Choddy, drawing on his boots, while Mrs. Torrance put an end to the altercation by inquiring if he were "scared to go."

"Scared? No!" said Choddy with supreme scorn. "*Me* scared o' goin' to Saintsbury!"

But the question had put him on his mettle, and he shuffled off with a sense of greater importance to the stable.

"Where's Choddy's overcoat?" said Mrs. Torrance, "'n' his scarf? Toddy, did you hev' it on?" . . . And presently the whole house was in uproar, with children running here and there exploring every corner from the dining-room cupboard drawer to the wood-shed.

When the overcoat had been at last discovered on top of the ash barrel in the shed, and the matter of the scarf had been settled by Choddy's consenting to wear Toddy's, Mrs. Torrance had come to a more normal state

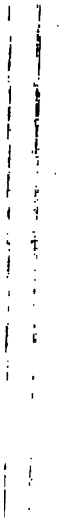


of mind, and when Choddy had started off on a gallop, anxious to show what he could do, she came back ready to question me in detail.

"Poor child," she said, weeping afresh, "I hope her father'll not be too hard on her. She didn't understand, 'n' indeed, who'd ha' thought it o' Dr. Jamieson. 'N' we were all taken with him jist as much as Gay, only Dave always said he hoped he'd not be sich a white-livered man as his father—whatever that meant, fer I'm sure Jim Jamieson never looked as if he had anything wrong with his liver more'n any other man. . . . No, no, it'll be better fer Gay to stay away till her father's got cooled off. . . . Poor dear child, it'll all be a sore trouble to her, 'n' if I could only trust the children not to upset the lamp or play with the fire, I'd go right over with ye, 'n' see her."

"I'll stay with the children," I said.

"Thank ye, thank ye," she said, with real gratitude, "I'll jist throw a shawl over my head 'n' go, then; 'n' I'll not be long, fer mebbe Dave'll be home soon, 'n' if he isn't too



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"She acted like a jist went off out in 'n' Gay to ourselve Gay, she was ever sc shook her curls, thou to see how white she that child's got thin thought a queer lot

us all!" and again she took to crying, and rubbing her eyes with her apron. "Well, well, if only Dave'll be easy with the child I suppose no harm's done, 'n' she's well rid o' that scamp of a doctor."

When I got back to Mrs. Might's, I found that Gay had been sent to bed.

Mrs. Might closed the door of the sitting-room, and put me in her best arm-chair.



Then she took down her smelling-salts bottle, as if to be prepared for the worst, and sat down on the extreme edge of the sofa, opposite to me; and I answered the inquiry in her eyes by telling her the whole story.

When I had finished, she sat quite still, looking hard at the floor; but there was an expression upon her face that I did not all understand.

In a few minutes she looked up. "Peggie," she said, "Gay spoke o' wishin' she was in the river. D'ye think she told ye *everything?*"

"I think so," I said.

But she shook her head. "It's late," she said, "'n' mebbe I oughtn't to go botherin' her now, but I can't rest this night till I've

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Gay comin' here white as a ghost, 'n' lookin' 's if she'd seen ten; 'n' Mrs. Torrance runnin' over in the dark with her eyes all red. But I never thought the child 'ud hev' acted so obstreperous. . . . Dear, dear, if the girls 'ud only be satisfied to look kind on good, straightfor'ed, common boys like Dick Carmichael, 'n' not be forever wantin' to be up in the world with scamps that's been gallivantin' dear knows where, 'n' nobody knows about! . . . Not as I'd see Dick Carmichael, thrown away on Gay Torrance, mind ye, but there's lots of others good enough. . . . Well, well—it's mebbe not all her own fault. Matilda Torrance hesn't done her dooty by that girl, lettin' her hev' everything she wanted all her life, 'n' bringin' her up to think she was too dainty to work or take any interest in anything only makin' a big match. . . . Well, well, it does seem funny how people without backbone enough in them to bring up one child proper should ha' hed ten! . . . However, we'll do the best we can now by Gay. Poor child! She's had a hard lesson, 'n' I only hope Dave

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ing down at her from the foot of the bed, and when at last I looked up I saw tears slowly trickling down the brown cheeks; and the mother-light which transformed Amanda Might's face, in the faded eyes.

"Poor dear! Poor dear! Poor, foolish child!" she whispered, slowly shaking her head. Then she went out and closed the door, and I began to take down my hair.

When I turned round an instant later, Gay's big, blue eyes were wide open, looking at me.

"Why, did we wake you?" I said.

"No, I was not asleep," with a faint little smile. "Only I didn't want to talk—*then*. Hurry, Peggie, I want you to take me in your arms again."

A moment later she said, "She is kind—oh, so kind. I never could have thought it before. She talked to me so strangely—but—but—in a little while I—I—didn't seem to mind it somehow. I never thought she could be motherly like that."

"Mrs. Might, you mean?"

"Yes. People aren't always what they seem, are they?"

"No."

When I had put out the light and crept in beside her she snuggled very close to me, and for a long time said nothing at all, only sobbed short dry sobs. Then she lay very still, and presently said:

"Do you think everybody 'll hear, Peggie?"

"I don't know, dear; I hope not."

"It 'll all depend on father. One can never know what he 'll do or say. If he 'd only let me go home, oh, I'd work so hard, and put up with anything!"

"Surely, surely he will."

"I'm afraid he 'll be so very angry. If he is, Peggie—and I deserve it, I know I do now—I 'll just have to go far, far away. And oh, Peggie, what can I do away? I suppose I should be able to take care of children, but—I should hate it so! I do love the children at home, Peggie, but I was so impatient even with them."

I tried to encourage her, but it was a hopeless undertaking, for I do not think she heard half that I was saying.

"I suppose everybody here 'll think me so wicked," she said, after another silence. "But Peggie, things are so strange. I never dreamed of wrong. Other girls loved, and married, and were so happy and everything right—how could I know? And I did love Hudson so, Peggie"—with a sob—"so that I could have died with him, just to be with him! And at the last I thought everybody was down on him, believing lies about him, and breaking his heart. And I couldn't bear to send him away alone when he wanted me so. It seemed so right to be faithful in spite of everything. Oh Peggie, why are we made capable of feeling so, and things allowed to go on as if all were right when everything is so wrong?"

She was thinking, poor child, really thinking, perhaps for the first time in her life, and puzzling, as so many before her have done, over the problems that stretch out and out and whose answer lies, perhaps, only in eternity.

As for me, with my small experience, what could I say but tell her to hope that all would

be well, and to be thankful that I had come upon her when I did.

"You can't direct your feelings, Peggie," she went on. "You like people or you don't like them, and you love them or you don't love them. That's all there is about it. And if you happen to care for the wrong one —oh, Peggie, is one so dreadfully to blame?"

And I, thinking again of Dick, could only say, "Perhaps not. Yet we are responsible for keeping misdirected feelings under control—when we have found them to be misdirected."

"I know," she said, "you mean we shouldn't act, no matter how we feel. Yes, yes, I did wrongly there, Peggie. I shouldn't have taken things so into my own hands. And now I'm getting my punishment."

"I thought," I said, presently, "that it was Dick you cared for most, Gay."

"Dick Carmichael?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

And I reminded her of how she had seemed to show preference for Dick at Mrs. Might's

party and on other occasions, and of how she had kept up a correspondence with him.

"Oh Peggie, you dear, foolish girl," she said, "how could you know that I was just using Dick all the time to stir up Hudson's jealousy a very, very little?"

I drew away from her involuntarily.

"And you were just playing with Dick's feelings, Gay?" I said, sternly.

"No, no, Peggie—I wasn't so bad as that. Dick seemed just like a big brother to me, and I knew he didn't care a bit more for me than for a kitten he might play with—in *that* way, I mean."

"But perhaps you were mistaken."

"No, I was not mistaken. And," fiercely, "neither was I mistaken about Hud Jamieson! He *did* love me, Peggie. If he was false in that profession it was to you, and to that—that poor girl he married. He lied to me in some things, he lied to us all; but Peggie, I know he told the truth when he told me he loved me!"

"As far as he could love anyone," I said.

"Yes, Gay, I believe he did." This much I I could say to her safely now.

So we lay there all through the night, Gay ever and anon tossing about like a child in a feverish sleep, but I knew that she was not sleeping.

Once, toward morning she whispered, "Are you sleeping, Peggie?"

"No."

"Do you know what I've been thinking?—and oh, my mind is hurrying so, going from one thing to another as if my head would burst with the whirling! I've been seeing myself, oh, for ever so long, walking, walking as I said I should, through the woods and the fields, keeping away from the road, and trying to keep by the fences where my tracks would not show so in the snow. I think I know now, Peggie, how criminals feel; and yet I haven't committed such a dreadful crime, have I, Peggie?"

"Child, child!" I said, "What's giving you such foolish fancies?" for I feared that she was raving a little; but she answered:

"You know when I go away, I don't want

to meet anyone. I couldn't bear to see people's smiles, and know that everyone was looking down on me, and thinking, perhaps the—the dreadful thing that—that Mrs. Might feared, just at first. I was very angry just when she told me that—but then she was so really kind and—and motherly about it. Oh, I can't tell you just how—but I think if anyone else in Oroway had mentioned such a thing I should have struck her! So what can I do, but skulk away like any other wrongdoer?"

"Gay, you must stay right here."

"But if father 'll not let me go home?"

"I think Amanda Might will want to keep you?"

"And face everyone? Oh, Peggie, how could I do it, and people saying I had been driven from home! I couldn't do it, Peggie."

"Then, if ever you go away, dear," I said, willing to humour her whim, "I will take you myself. But Gay, everything will come out all right, I am sure, and you will be happy here with us again."

She kissed me on both cheeks, and presently

by her deep, uneven breathing, I knew that she was in a troubled sleep.

In the morning Mrs. Might's parting words to me were, "Well, we'll fight fer her anyway, Peggie," and I left feeling that any combat in which Mrs. Might should happen to be engaged, would be quite sure to be an unequal one, with Mrs. Might on the winning side.

To tell all the details of the days that followed would require a long, long story; but I, at least, cannot tell them, for I did not know all that was said.

Dave Torrance, as we had feared, was obdurate. Coming home from Saintsbury in a towering rage, he had declared to the neighbourhood that Gay had disgraced him, and that he should have no more to do with her. Mrs. Torrance's tears, and Amanda Might's expostulations had no effect upon him, and to our great regret, Miss Tring, who might have proved a mediator, was confined to the house for two or three weeks by a heavy cold that had settled in her throat. As for Gay, she had become sullen and morose, even to Mrs. Might, to whom, in the first crav-

ing for sympathy, she had been responsive; and for a time it took all of the good woman's watching to keep her from stealing away.

Whatever others might have thought of this inclination, I, at least, did not wonder much. Gay Torrance, the beauty, had become the neighbourhood talk, and the wildest speculations were indulged in at her expense, the more readily since it was so impossible to find out anything but the most meagre details. She was down, at any rate, and there were enough to throw just a little more mud upon her. Commonplace maidens who had angled with all the skill they knew for the young doctor, were now ready enough to say that it served Gay Torrance right after the shameless way she had run after the doctor; and mothers to whom Gay Torrance's loveliness had always been an eyesore, were now not slow in saying that they "alwus knew Gay Torrance 'ud come to some bad end. She'd been a handful to her mother, sure enough." As for the doctor, they had always been suspicious of him, and had let him know there was little use of his coming round after

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So things went on
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with Mrs. Might, subdued and quiet, but carrying her head very high and proudly. Mrs. Might told me about it afterward, how Gay had got over her sullenness all of a sudden, one day, and had thrown herself into her arms, sobbing like a baby, and how, after that, she had followed Mrs. Might around like a pet lamb, and had done everything she told her, and had become willing to go in and out among the people, as she had advised her, and as a decent girl should.

"It was just a miracle how she turned over," Mrs. Might said; but I knew well that the miracle lay in Gay's having at last found out the prim old lady's great warm heart, hidden down far beneath the severe features, and the purple ribbons, and the cut and hewn "way o' the Greens."

Mrs. Torrance came to visit her girl every day; but it was long enough before Dave Torrance was willing to meet her again, and then, I am sure, the good work was due to Miss Tring, although no one ever knew from anything she ever said in reference to it.

When the reconciliation took place, how-



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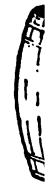
"We hev' reason to be thankful this day," she said. "But I'll miss the child, I'd got to feel almost as if she was my own, doin' my dooty by her. Well, well, 'twas good to hev a taste of her anyway. 'N' it 's the happy girl she 'll be this day!"

As for the other poor creature who had come to our house with her baby, we were at first sorely put to it to know what we should do with her. But, as old Yorkie Dodd had been responsible for bringing her to us, so he solved the problem of taking her away. Just before Christmas he came driving along one day and asked for my mother.



"I 've come to reason at last, Mrs. Mallory," he said, "'n' I know no spry girl or wumman 'ud be willin' to take an old block like me fer a man. But I was thinkin' mebbe that poor young thing that 's with ye, 'n' seems to hev' no folks of her own, 'ud be glad enough to git the chance of earnin' a home fer herself 'n' her baby. She looks likely enough, 'n' there ain't no great shakes o' work to do, fer my sister kin do plenty of odd chores, 'n' 'ud be real handy to mind the little one when Mrs.

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CHAPTER XVI

A REVOLUTION

IT WAS not long after this that the series of "meetings" began in the Back Line school-house, which eventually shook our district, as old Chris said, "like a reed shaken by the wind, stiddy, yet thrilled all through, 'n' ready fer more."

For some time some members of a sect, calling themselves simply "Christians," had been settling along the Back Line where the lots were small, and the land poor. A quiet, decent sort of people they were, keeping to their own affairs, quite in disregard of the somewhat Pharisaical condescension with which our wealthier, more orthodox neighbourhood was disposed to regard them.

Now they had become "strong" enough to have a "preacher" of their own, and his coming was heralded by a series of meetings

to which, by some strange chance, our people began going.

Before long little else was talked of among those who attended, not in a racy, nine-days' wonder style, but with a seriousness as though the latter days were at hand (although this was not once mooted among them), and life had become filled with a new and strange import.

Chris was the first of our household to attend, and even in him there was a change, and that strongly marked. It seemed as though he had got a new lease of life, and I was not surprised when, one day, he said:

"Dash it, Peg, that was all bosh I told ye about glidin' down hill easy like—d'ye mind? A man ought to die in the harness—*that's* where he ought to die, with the straps all buckled 'n' the check up! . . . Dear, dear, Peg, will I ever git old enough to ha' learned things right, 'n' not be tellin' ye wrong all the time? It's enough to make me keep me old mouth shut tight, like old Ben Peters beyond who believes that every word ye say more 'n' 'Yea' 'n' 'Nay' 's a sin. . . .

I kin tell ye, Peg, a man never gits too old to need wakin' up, 'n' that fellow over at the meetin' house jist got here in time to pick me, fer one, up off me slope and turn me round, 'n' set me climbin' up the other way to the hill-top, where the air is bracin' like, 'n' the big river 'll jist creep up 'n' up afore one knows it, 'n' take a fellow off afore he kin shuffle his harness aside, collar 'n' hames 'n' all!"

Yet I had always had a prejudice against "revival" meetings, and to the last held out against going, with my mother, who refused to go because "Robert Mallory, who was elder o' the church fer fifteen years," had never thought it necessary to go to them "riotous things."

Indeed, I think we should not have gone at all had it not been for a rather peculiar incident which happened at the time of the meetings, although, ostensibly, *not* because of them.

About Oroway Centre, to which the mail arrived from Saintsbury only three times a week, we had established a sort of rural mail

delivery system of our own. Each farmer had erected at his gate a substantial mail box, fitted with door and key, and with a slit for placing the letters; and whoever happened to have business at the "Centre" acted voluntarily as postman, distributing the mail on his way home as far as he went. Among others we Mallorys had been induced to erect a box and, considering the fact that to reach it meant a drive through the wood-lane to the Clearing, the frequency with which we found our letters therein was no small testimony to the obligingness of our neighbours.



Going down to the box one bright morning in January, not long after the New Year, I found, along with a parcel of letters all bearing the Oroway Centre postmark, a bulky envelope bearing neither postmark nor postage stamp, and addressed to my mother in a thin, scrawling hand.

"Now who kin this be from?" said my mother, putting on her glasses and scanning the writing. "I'll bet ye it's that new neckscarf Amanda Might was makin' fer me fer a Christmas box, 'n' clean fergot because of

that fuss over Gay Torrance. Open it, Peggie, fer it 's time my hands was in the bread."

So saying she handed me the package, and began beating the bread sponge vigorously with a big iron spoon, while I, at my leisure, tore off the end of the envelope.

"Why, it 's—money!" I exclaimed.

"Money?"

"Yes, money," I repeated, mystified, yet jumping at the conclusion that Dick might have sent it in consideration of our loss at his father's hands long ago. Yet the writing was not Dick's. And the sickening dread came upon me that Dick was ill—perhaps dead.

As I drew out the roll of green bills, however, a paper came out with them. Opening it I read, written in the same scrawling hand, the words: "*Conscience Money. I pay back four fold.*" Nothing else, neither mark nor signature to show who the sender might be; but I could have shouted with relief, for this was not Dick's way of doing things.

My mother had come close to me, and as I

handed money and paper to her, I saw that she was trembling violently, with her face in the contortion of agitation which only the strongest emotion could have caused.

"It 's Carmichael!" she almost shrieked as the bills touched her hand. "It 's blood money!" And with an involuntary impulse she threw the roll from her as though it had burned her. It fell upon the damper of the stove, and rolled from it thence into the open grate, where the coals had been arranged all hot for the breakfast toasting.



I sprang for it, and so did Miss Tring, but between us, interfering with each other as we could not but do, it was not snatched out quickly enough, and before we could rescue it, it had burst out in a flame.

Miss Tring, it is true, snatched the flaming mass from the stove, but it burned her hands and fell again upon the coals, where we could but watch it fall rapidly into a quivering black mass upon which a solitary *X* shone out, first red, then white, ere the suction of the chimney drew it whirling among the flames.

Then what was there to do but sit down and look at one another in speechless wonder.

My mother was the first to break the silence.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" she wailed, with her saving propensity again paramount, "What made me do that? I'm sure I never thought it 'ud ha' gone into the stove! 'N' we didn't even know how much there was! 'N' if Henry Carmichael hed a mind to pay up fer that timber he took, why the money was ours, 'n' I never thought to ha' done you out of it, Peggie."

"Are you sure it was Henry Carmichael who sent it," asked Miss Tring.

"Sure, yes sure! who else 'ud be sendin' conscience money to me? . . . Hev' ye any idea how much was in it, Peggie?"

"Not the slightest."

"Oh dear, oh dear! It was a fine heap anyway! Whatever made me do it? 'N' me so anxious to lay up fer ye, jist as yer father 'd ha' done, Peggie!"

So my poor little mother wailed away, rocking to and fro in her low chair, and wiping her eyes with her apron, while I tried to assure

her that I should do very well without the money, which we had never expected to see anyway.

When Chris came in the story must be told him. He took the envelope in his wrinkled hands and looked long at it.

"Well, I don't know who sent it," he said, "but there 's one thing clear, 'twas the stirrin' o' some poor soul set it on its way, 'n' the power o' God 's surely abroad in this place!"

"Carmichael sent it, of course," said my mother.

But Chris only shook his head, and sat down to eat his breakfast in a very preoccupied way.

All day long my little mother kept bemoaning the loss of the money, and all it might have done for me; but I only kept hearing Chris's words, "The power o' God's surely abroad in this place!" How the power of God could be working especially in Henry Carmichael, who had attended none of the meetings, and was not, therefore, likely to be wrought upon at this season more than any

other, I could not exactly see; but was not I, in my way, just a sort of little heathen?—And then, there was no knowing how far influences may travel.

At any rate, I should like to see something of those meetings, from which, according to Chris, had emanated a power sufficient to send down money as from the clouds; and, as evening drew on, I set myself to induce my mother to go that night, and so prevailed that she at last consented to go, and suggested that I should run round and bring Amanda Might also. Miss Tring, who had only been prevented from attending sooner by the fact that my mother and I had not gone, consented, as a matter of course.

"I never did hev' much use fer revival meetin's," said Mrs. Might, when I drove over for her. "Fer they always seemed to me like the fizzin' up that comes when ye put soda in a vinegar drink; 'n' it seems to make light o' religion to think it needs special stirrin' up once every two or three years, when it's given us fer our daily bread 'n' meat. Livin' right right along, 'pears to me, is all that's

expected of us, 'n' the noblest thing we kin do. 'N' sich livin' comes easiest o' daily trustin'. . . . But I'm not sayin' good isn't sometimes got out 'o sich things, 'n' seein's ye've come all this way fer me I'll go—though ye've got to bring me back to-night, Peggie, fer I've promised to sit up with Mrs. Carmichael after twelve."

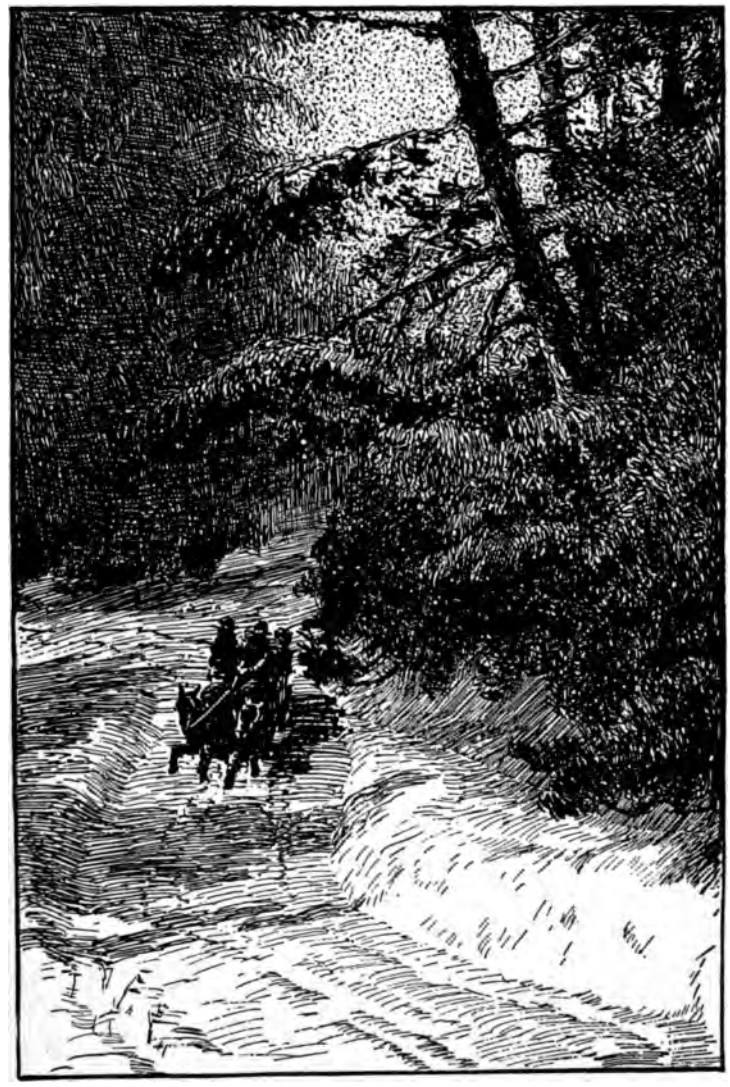
"Is Mrs. Carmichael ill?"

"Jist one of her turns, but ye see Dick isn't there now to take his share with Henry Carmichael at the nursin'. A rare hand Dick was with his mother, jist Henry Carmichael over again, that gentle 'n' tender-like with her. . . . Peggie, I never did see why you 'n' Dick Carmichael didn't take to other. I alwus had ye set out fer other, 'n' after that night o' my parin'-bee, when ye went home together, I thought——"

"Mrs. Might," I said, "did you work a little plan that night?"

She glanced at me rather shamefacedly, then looked away crossly.

"Yes, I did," she said, "'n' neither o' ye ever guessed, neither; but a pile o' good it



"The night was crisp and beautiful"

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did anybody! Adam 'n' me might ha' saved ourselves the trouble!"

And so evident was her dudgeon at the thought of the failure of her plan that I burst out laughing. Mrs. Might as a matchmaker was truly Mrs. Might in a new guise.

"All the same," she went on, "if ye ever git a chance o' Dick Carmichael, Peg Mallory, 'n' don't take him, I say ye don't know how to put yer best foot foremost."

"Well, well, Dick isn't here, so how can I smile on him?" I laughed.

"No," she grumbled, "though what he wants rampin' around them lumber woods at the land's end fer, 's more than I kin make out."

* * * * *

When the time came for setting out from the Clearing for the school-house, the night was crisp and beautiful, with the moon shining, and a thin mistiness of the evening congealing into rime on every twig; and as we jingled alone in our little jumper sleigh, with old Chris holding the reins and singing

snatches of hymns in the old, low drone, but more uncertain of the tune than ever, we could hear bells in all directions and see the sleighs turning down here and there, toward the Back Line.

When we arrived the little school-house was already packed almost to its fullest capacity; but some of the "Christians" made way for us up near the front, and they themselves found seats on the platform, where the preacher, a serious-faced man with a deep, thrilling voice, was giving out the number of a hymn.

I do not know what there was about that meeting which affected us all, especially me, who had been so often careless, and "mindful about many things." But I know that when I looked upon these "Christians," humble people, for whom the foolish things of the world seemed to have few attractions, and saw them singing with rapt and devout faces, I felt as though I had gone back over the centuries, and had come face to face with the little band who had been destined to become fishers of men. I did not wonder at the silence and reverence of the place, for here noise or

foolish gaping would have seemed sacrilege; and when the "preacher" began—his low, earnest voice, telling just the old story but with new power, all shorn of cant and the stale and meaningless expressions which so often are but as the tinkling of cymbals, and make but as little impression on the heart—I wanted to cry, and dared not look up lest the big tears should roll down my cheeks. When the sermon was over there was just a little time given in which others might speak, and I listened intently, and felt that these simple people had indeed found something of which I knew, oh, so little.

Then, when several had spoken, and some belonging to our church at the Centre and not to the "Christians," Jim Jamieson got slowly up.

I remember yet the quick revulsion of feeling that took place in me. I had nothing against Jim Jamieson, nor had anyone, so far as I knew; but we were all used to his long "testimonies," and his yet longer prayers, interspersed with sighs and groans, and uttered in a voice as different from Jim Jamieson's

ordinary voice as might be. It was almost as though the spell of the meeting was broken, and I turned away, prepared to think of something else. Yet, in a moment I found myself listening breathlessly.

"I hev' been a wicked man," he was saying in a voice from which the old-time Pharisaism had all gone. "We hev' been told to make confession with our tongues—'n' I'm here to-night to confess. I've been a wicked man!"—with a broken sob—"I've defrauded them that trusted me, 'n' done sich wickedness as, God knows, I'm bein' punished fer this day! If ever a man was in hell it's me to-night, here now!"—his voice ascending to a shriek—"'N' hev' been ever since these meetin's started! I can't undo the past, but I can, at least, restore fourfold, 'n' that I'm doin' 'n' will do until the last has been paid, so help me Heaven!"

Amid the silence of the grave, in which people scarcely could find breath for astonishment and tension of feeling, he sat slowly down again, and let his head droop upon his hands, over which his thin, reddish hair fell, in

lean locks, as though it, too, would cover his shame and his misery.

Then, before the reaction could come, and the people could relax from their statuesque silence, I saw old Chris, at the end of our seat, hitch and hitch, with one hand upon his walking-stick, as though he were about to get up.

The minister's hand fell upon his open book, and he opened his lips to speak; but the old man, who never had spoken in public before in all his life, intercepted him. With a final effort he stood upright, placing both wrinkled hands upon the desk behind him, and leaning his weight upon them, while the light from the lamp above shone on his bald head with its few gray locks trailing over his coat collar, and upon his dear, rugged old face, throwing out all its shadows, and revealing in it a strength and fire that I had never seen there before.

Turning full upon Jim Jamieson, who had not yet raised his stricken head, he spoke.

"Jim Jamieson, it's not fer me, weak old sinner as I am, to condemn any man, er to



cleaving through
its farthest corners
in the air—"don't
in this world kin
money? . . . I
bein' blamed fer ye
sayin' there is, mi
. . . 'N' if there
anyone bein' blam
you've done, ye've
if ye hope fer forg
Mark my work J
freedom fer *you*'s
under a burden tha
ders 'n' on your sh
it!"

Chris stopped sp
down. Instead he
forward and glarin
cowering lower an

his tongue, and the lance of an upbraiding conscience.

"Speak, man!" continued Chris in an instant. "If ye've been no man, but jist a craven coward, speak up this night 'n' play the man fer onst!"

But still Jim Jamieson did not move, except that his head sank lower and lower.

"Dash it, man!" roared Chris, "Why don't ye speak? It's time fer any man that's made the profession you've made to quit bein' the coward . . . Jim Jamieson"—slowly and impressively—"As ye hope *fer mercy on yer own soul, speak!*"

Then slowly the bowed head was raised, and a pallid face appeared; surely not Jim Jamieson of the bland, self-satisfied countenance, this haggard creature, with the wild frightened eyes? Surely this was not Jim Jamieson—this decrepit man, aged by a score of years in a moment, who rose, clinging to the back of the seat before to steady him?

When he began to speak it was with lips white as those of death, and we strained our ears to hear.

I could take it out without a
wiser. I knowed the blame
Carmichael—'n' I took it out
night,—Heaven ha' mercy
voice broke in a sob, and
it seemed that he would
looked up again, with a fierc
and continued without breal
voice rising higher, and hig
forced by some inward pov
the depths of his wickedness
"'N' I stole grain from F
granary, 'n' from John Bil
Henry Carmichael's, 'n' from
A little here 'n' a little ther
ever knew! I 've done it yea
It seemed as though there w
makin' me want to take thing
I'm—I'm tryin' to make up f
to make up to Robert Mallor

sinking again until it was almost an inaudible whisper, while he clung to the desk as though the effort had been too much for him, and he must fall. "'N' I'll do me best by John Billings, 'n' Henry Carmichael, 'n' Adam Might, four times over—four times over."

His lowest whisper could be heard throughout the room, so great was the tension of the silence, but when he began again it was in a voice, high, thin, and strained.

"I tell ye, there's no worse hell than I've been in this month back! I never seemed to see my sin right afore! But I've got to get out of it!—I've got to get out of it! I've been a thief, 'n' coward, 'n' sneak, 'n'—yes, ye're right, Chris Bernard, I've let the blame o' takin' that timber lie on Henry Carmichael all these years! Robert Mallory blamed him, 'n' his fam'ly blamed him, that I know! 'N' I laughed in my sleeve over it! . . . But I tell all this night before the whole o' ye here, 'n' I only wish Henry Carmichael was here too to hear it! . . . Now, then, do what ye will to me."

He staggered back into his seat, but there

was a light as of triumph on his seamed and haggard countenance, and he folded his arms across his breast as one who can do no more.

When he had finished a perceptible movement ran among the people, but only Chris spoke.

"Ye've been the man this night, Jim Jamieson," he said, "Heaven grant ye may be kept there!"

Then he sat down, and the minister began to sing in a low voice some song about pardon, and triumph over sin. One by one the "Christians" joined him, and as they sang softly a great sob was mingled with their melody. It was Jim Jamieson. He was sobbing like a little child.

Glancing at Chris, I saw that the big tears were rolling down his cheeks, and presently he got up and hobbled over beside Jim Jamieson, to whom he began talking, with his old head bent low beside that penitent, sin-stricken one. All through the audience women were weeping, and men were still looking puzzled and astonished. As for me, I felt that my heart would burst, and sobbed aloud.

Amanda Might, too, was wiping away the tears surreptitiously, but my little mother, who wept often on such slight pretext, was looking straight before her, and I doubt if she realised now that she was in the little school-house.

As we went forth into the keen, crisp air, the bells jingled, and the moon shone, and the diamond rime glittered on every tree, and my heart sang. For were my thoughts not now of Carmichael, and unchidden? Henry Carmichael had been cleared of taking the timber. Might he not, in spite of all, be clear of the rest?

All the way home but little was said.

Amanda Might spoke once. "I 'll never say a word against meetin's again!" she said, and the way in which she closed her lips indicated another opinion cut, dried, and safely harvested.

My mother spoke not at all, and Chris just sang and sang in his low croon, while I looked into the white depths of the wood where the moon was making fantastic shadows on the snow, and the dark tree trunks seemed

shadow passed across it. It
probably, and I wondered wl
when he heard Amanda Migl
I wondered where Dick was,
doing to-night, away up in t
of the North. Sleeping, pı
time in one of the big bunk
from the big fire-place flick
tired face. Poor Dick!

When we were again ho
passing Chris to go into the l

"Well, lassie, 'n' what d
the meetin'?"

"Oh Chris," I said, "I aı
went."

He was rubbing his chin aı
in the old ruminating way.

"Aye," he continued, prı
waited, "it's been fer us all
what the power o' the Lord



"When I went to my room that night I did a very foolish thing"

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I'm thinkin' it's alwus abroad, 'n' it's only because we're wilfully blind that we don't see it sooner. The little ripplin' brook, 'n' the growin' grass, 'n' the seasons comin' 'n' goin', 'n' friends carin' fer us, ought to be enough. But sometimes it isn't; an' then there comes a great happiness fer one; 'n' a great sorrow fer another—like Carmichael there; 'n' sich things as meetin's fer others, like Jim Jamieson, in some way or another, ye see, the Lord speaks to us all. . . . Well, lassie, I'm glad it all came out so fair to-night. Will ye believe now what I alwus said o' Henry Carmichael?"

And I just turned and hugged the dear old soul until I must have hurt him. But he only gave me a sly poke.

"Hi! Hi!" he said, with his jolly humour back again, "Keep that fer Dick! Dash it if I don't wish I was Dick!" And now, what made him say that?

When I went to my room that night I did a very foolish thing. I went to the mirror, and, taking up the lamp, held it long before my face, scanning every line and curve of it.

It was not a beautiful face, possibly a very plain one, yet there was some strength and expression in it. "You, who never had a lover in your life, and, with your face, never likely to!" Gay Torrance had said, and the words still rankled. Yet, was it true that my face could come between me and a possible happiness?

I took down my hair from the little tight knots in which, for convenience and speed in doing up, I usually wore it. It was long, glossy, and luxuriant, and when given its way fell into broad, black waves. I puffed it out from my face, twisted it, turned it, then, finally, parted it fairly in the middle, and let it fall loosely as it would to the back of my neck, where I coiled it and fastened it with a silver pin. Even I could see the improvement. The simplicity of arrangement brought out my profile, which was not bad.

Last of all I took down a pretty, pink jacket which Miss Tring had given me, and which, waiting for an opportune occasion, I had never worn. Slipping it on, again I studied the effect, as carefully as did ever demoiselle

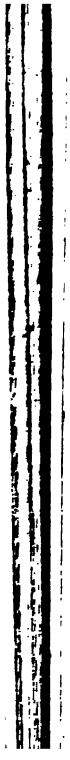
about to step before the footlights. Again there was an improvement, and there was impressed upon me an inkling of what well-chosen dress may do. . . . No, I was not hideous, let Gay think what she might.

Then, all of a sudden I flushed with shame. What was Dick to me that I should be prinking myself in consciousness of him? No, Dick was nothing to me, nothing, nothing. Why should I think of Dick?



Then I slowly took off the pink jacket and braided my hair, and with a little sigh—for it seemed that I was always called upon to renounce, but oh, so much less tragically than had been poor Gay—once more put Dick resolutely from my mind, and tried to shame myself with the thought that I had come straight from a religious meeting, and *such* a meeting, to prink myself out in silver pins and pink waists, and stand twisting and turning before the glass like any giddy miss of sixteen.

At all events the great burden consequent upon Carmichael's supposed misdoings had been rolled from me forever. It was borne upon me somehow, that he was as guiltless of



some such influen
bear long ago! It
power that could
to lay forth the ver
souls—even to Jim
ling coward, to wh
been as the knife
wonderful, wonderfu
so strange!

CHAPTER XVII

A JOURNEY WITH A CURIOUS ENDING

UPON the following morning my mother went about with an air of decision, such as I had observed in her but once before, and that strangely, on the night of my father's death. She said nothing to me of what was in her mind, but shortly after breakfast bade me put on my wraps, as she wished me to go out with her.

I obeyed her, wondering much what could be in the wind, for my little mother could be but seldom induced to go out, even to make a neighbour a visit. Yet I asked no question as we went over the crisp snow, through the wood-lane, thence on in the direction of the old home.

At the gate, where the lilacs, now grown into great thickets, were all glittering with a thousand diamonds in the morning sun, she looked in, walking more slowly; then drew



stangely indeed did I
the path which my fe
so seldom before. I
felt the strangeness
paused and looked at
she trudged on again
What she could be ab
to which we were go
knew that, whatever
make no worse the re
and Carmichael, an
seemed a step toward
light of the sun.

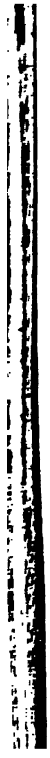
Minnie, the maid,
astonishment.

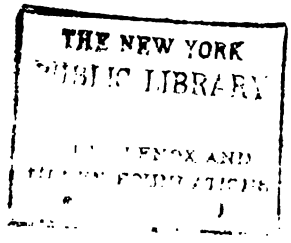
"Mrs. Carmichael's
she said, taking it f
come to visit the sick
like to hev' ye come

But my mother mc



"At the gate, where the lilacs, now grown into great thickets, were all glittering with a thousand diamonds in the morning sun"




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"It's Henry Carmichael I want to see," she said. "Is he at home?"

"Yes ma'am. I'll tell him ma'am," said Minnie, more nonplussed then ever; and while we waited in the neat living room, with the fire burning and the kettle singing just as it had done before when, as a little girl, I had sat shyly holding my cookie in my hand, I could almost hear the beating of my heart, so anxious was I, lest, once more, there should be possibility of misunderstanding.

Henry Carmichael came in, cap in hand, bowed courteously to my mother, who took no notice of his salutation, and shook hands with me. Then he sat down in evident embarrassment.

My mother did not keep him waiting long.

"Henry Carmichael," she said, "ye'll hev' heard through Amanda Might o' what happened at the meetin' last night. 'N' I'm doin' what Robert Mallory 'ud ha' done if he'd been alive this day. I have come to tell ye that I'm sorry for what we believed in the wrong. 'N' I'm right glad a bad

matter's been set right. 'N' I trust ye'll bear no grudge against Robert Mallory."

She could say no more, for the reaction, after the effort to which she had steeled herself was upon her, and she was sobbing away again, my own child-like, innocent, little mother.

For one moment Henry Carmichael sat as though in perplexity, fidgeting his great hands, for in some ways he was a shy man, this giant Carmichael, as giants usually are; then he arose, and with one stride was beside my mother, with his hand on the arm of her chair, soothing her as he might have soothed a little child with tone and word.

"Tut, tut, woman! It's all right! Let by-gones be by-gones. I'm only glad it's clear at last. There, there, don't cry! *Sure* I've no grudge against Robert Mallory. I was worse than him. We were both mistaken. The best o' men may be mistaken sometimes, then what of a poor devil like me, with a temper that's been his ruin? Sure, I was worse than him! 'N' fer every hard word I ever said to him, or against him, I'm sorry.

There, there! don't cry, Mrs. Mallory, don't cry."

As he spoke, leaning over her, with his voice dropping into the low Carmichael music, all the liking for him, which I had been crushing down for so many years, rushed up in me like a torrent which has broken down all barriers. I, too, had my confession to make. I, too, must make it before, in my own soul, I stood clear with Henry Carmichael.

Getting up I went to him, and took hold of his other hand.

"And I, oh, I too have accused you, as I now *know* wrongly," I said, "though no one has given me proof . . . Mr. Carmichael—I—I—oh, I saw you leaving our barn that night, and I—I thought——"

"You thought I set fire to it, as Dick did?" he interrupted. "Oh, girl, girl!"

He was standing very straight and very still, with his gray eyes reading my very soul. I could not bear the wondering reproach in them, and, with a sudden impulse, dropped my face, and hid it in my hands.

voice,—"when I drove him
the hardest act I ever
reasonablest. But I'm nc
the best thing ever happe
with the sore heart that I
it I found out jist what an
I'd been, 'n' how far from-
ought to be."

So evident was his forg
I dared to look up at h
looking straight at me, but
now full of kindness.

"After all," he continu
der ye thought what ye
saw. But girl, girl, 'tw
ever lightnin' struck a ba
took me there?"

"Hush, hush!" I saic
know."

"But I *want* ye to kr

because of a poor sheepie that was bleatin' 'n' bleatin' in the storm, 'n' hed got away from the rest somehow. I lay 'n' listened till I could listen no longer. The poor beasties, ye know they hev' their feelin's 'n' their lonelinesses jist like us, 'n' it 's sore to hear them, when ye know them 'n' their ways. So I got up 'n' went over jist to put it in out o' the cold rain. Poor sheepie, it 'ud ha' been well fer it if I 'd left it out that night! But, girlie," drawing me closer, "don't think I blame ye fer what ye thought. Ye saw what looked like it, 'n' before that ye'd only seen the worst o' swearin' old Henry Carmichael."



"I 'd found out the other side of you, too, Mr. Carmichael," I said, "only I thought it my duty to hate you."

"'N' told me so, too," he added, with a twinkle. "D 'ye mind the day ye told me I lied, 'n' that ye hated me?—that day on the road-work when Sandy Dodd was struck? . . . Well, there wasn't nothin' two-faced about that, little girl, 'n' I 've liked ye ever since. . . . 'N' now," he went on,



scrapin's," and the b
so much infectious n
through the room.
laugh with him, for,
I was wondering how
had penetrated my s

The next instant h
there, standing in t
the stairs, with folde
smile, stood Dick, w

"Dick!" I said, h
to him in the sudd
ment. Then remen
a stranger maiden, t
ed to my face, and
hands.

"Peggie!" he said,
the tone which mad
shame all gone, and
possessing me.

He now was holding out both arms, and without a word I walked over to him.

* * * * *

When Dick and I, foolish children, came to ourselves, we were alone in the room, for my mother and Mr. Carmichael had suddenly found it discreet to visit the dear invalid upstairs.

Mrs. Might, when, in a few moments, I met her, was radiant.

"I'll not give in yet, 'twasn't that walk home from the parin' bee done it!" She said.

Gay was my bridesmaid, and when, before the ceremony, she arranged my hair with the middle parting, and the loose, black waves running down to the silver-pinned coil, she told me over and over again how lovely I looked. But I am sure she looked so very much lovelier than I, with her face now so full of gentleness, and so spirituelle as to be fairer far than that of the old Gay, that the people must have looked at her rather than at the bride, whose only glory must have been because of her happiness.

I might go on writing of the fortunes of our little district; but, since one must stop somewhere, why not here? One loves to make a tale end with the wedding-bells; although, to my mind, the beauty of living begins, or should begin, just there.

I have wondered much what to call my little story. Dick teasingly suggests "Peg Mallory," or "The Reflections of Peg," both of which sound distressingly egotistical. But I shall turn the tables on him, having the pen in my own hand, and superscribe my little history with that word which has been the symbol to me of so much grief, so much trepidation, and such unspeakable happiness,

"CARMICHAEL."





